



# RESOUNDING VOICES

**FINAL REPORT  
2016-2024**

**FOR THE NETHERLANDS MINISTRY  
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

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# AKNOWLEDGEMENT

**This report is the culmination of the tireless efforts and dedication of numerous Voice stakeholders.**

First and foremost, we extend our deepest gratitude to all the **Voice grantee partners** who entrusted the programme with their stories and submitted reports, stories of change, outcome statements, impact stories, and project journeys that form the foundation of this report.

Second, we are sincerely grateful to the members of the **Voice Country and Global Coordination teams** for their invaluable contributions. The report was drafted and edited by a dedicated working group of five team members: Alexander Loer, Anne Mulehi, Ishita Dutta, Kayla Lapiz, and Tomás A. Chang Pico. We also acknowledge the guidance and efforts of Inez Hackenberg, Kahlille Seranilla, and Peris Kariuki, who facilitated the consultative process that provided the framework for this report. Additionally, Clemens Wennekes provided the financial data that enriches this report.

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The background features a teal gradient with a large, dark purple, low-poly abstract shape on the left. A flock of dark purple birds is scattered across the teal area. A white banner in the top right contains the chapter title.

**CHAPTER**

**01**

# **INTRODUCTION**



# VOICE PROGRAM

Launched in 2016, the Voice programme sought to address systemic inequalities and ensure that marginalised communities are not left behind. **Financed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and implemented by Oxfam Novib and Hivos, Voice operated in ten countries across Africa and Asia,** supporting civil society organisations and rightsholders in their pursuit of equality, dignity, and inclusion. **Over eight years, Voice allocated €60 million in grants, funding 748 projects that empowered rightsholders and fostered inclusive change.** Hivos coordinated the work of Voice in four countries: Indonesia, Philippines, Kenya and Tanzania; while Oxfam coordinated Voice in six countries: Laos, Cambodia, Uganda, Niger, Mali and Nigeria.

The programme was established within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 10, which aims to reduce inequality within and among countries. Despite positive economic, political and social developments in many regions, marginalised groups—such as people with disabilities, LGBTQI communities, women facing violence, indigenous peoples, and vulnerable youth and the elderly—have remained excluded from mainstream development efforts. Voice was designed to respond to these challenges by providing rightsholders with support to claim their rights, influence policy, and participate fully in society.

## AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO FUNDING CIVIL SOCIETY

Voice distinguished itself with an innovative approach to funding civil society organisations, working to ensure that resources reach those who have so far not been able to access them. Recognising that many marginalised groups operate within informal or loosely structured networks, **Voice took steps to make its grant-making processes accessible, inclusive, and flexible.** The programme was still circumvented by administrative compliance procedures, both due to donor requirements, organisational processes and a fast-shifting political context where clamp down on NGO activities is becoming the norm. However, adaptation strategies were implemented to overcome the hurdles and do 'business as unusual' in order to fulfil its mandate.







### Innovate and Learn Grants

Sought to test, scale, and share new approaches, about human-centred design, learning by doing, and Linking & Learning (L&L), to advance inclusion.



### Empowerment Grants

Focused on building the capacity of rightsholders to advocate for their rights and lead their own initiatives. In the extension phase, Voice introduced 'graduation' grants called **Empowerment Accelerator grants** to continue supporting the empowerment of rightsholders over a longer period.

The programme gave out different grants designed to meet the varying needs of rightsholders:

### Influencing Grants



Aimed at supporting organisations that seek to influence policies, laws, and social norms to create a more inclusive society.

### Sudden Opportunity Grants



Provided rapid funding in response to unexpected events or emerging strategic opportunities, allowing rightsholders to act swiftly when circumstances demanded.

# NOW-US! — THE VALUES THAT SHAPED VOICE

At the heart of Voice’s mission was its unwavering commitment to inclusion and participation, captured in the guiding principle **"Nothing About Us Without Us,"** also called **"NOW-Us!"** This highlighted both the urgency to act and the necessity to focus on those being left behind. This value was fundamental to Voice’s design and implementation, ensuring that rightsholders were not merely passive beneficiaries but active participants in the decision-making processes that shaped their lives.

In response to the findings of Voice’s mid-term review in 2019, greater emphasis was placed on ensuring meaningful representation of rightsholders within Voice’s systems and structures. As a result, the Voice Advisory Board evolved from a group of five members, including two civil society representatives, to an eight-member panel of activists from Asia and Africa, representing diverse social movements. Their invaluable perspectives and commitment were instrumental in guiding Voice, and we are proud to have shared this journey with them.





## Intersectionality: Addressing multiple forms of exclusion

Voice made an explicit commitment to intersectionality, recognising that marginalised groups and individuals often face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Whether supporting projects like the one by the Association des Jeunes pour l'Environnement et l'Education Civique (AJEEC), a project working with an intersectional focus to empower young women with disabilities in Niger or initiatives such as the one from **Khmer Education Network (KHEN)** to empower indigenous youth facing social and economic marginalisation, Voice prioritised support to holistic solutions that addressed the full complexity of rightsholders' lived experiences. By fostering partnerships between organisations working with different marginalised groups, with some initiatives stemming from the linking and learning (L&L process), Voice promoted cross-movement solidarity, encouraging grantee partners to learn from each other's struggles and share best practices.

## Linking and Learning: The heart and soul of Voice

Starting from words on paper, Linking and Learning (L&L) came to be recognised as Voice's unique feature by grantee partners by the time of its final impact evaluation. As the L&L community reflected on the evolution of L&L in the programme, true to style, no definitive checklist of Voice's approach emerged. Instead, several collective learning and reflection points emerged that have been some part of this approach. Learning to co-create better, and holding space for rightsholder leadership. The development of creative ways to express ourselves in an embodied language we all understand, to amplify our experiences and to advocate for respect and rights. The creation and curation of creative visual and spoken word products developed to support the empowerment and influencing work.

The following pages comprise the Voice final report. In response to a stated ask from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is not written as an annual report for the year 2024. Rather it seeks to present an 8-year retrospective responding to two key questions the Ministry asked of us:

**WHAT DID VOICE  
LEARN AS A  
PROGRAMME?**

**WHAT IMPACT DID  
VOICE HAVE?**

In addition to responding to these two questions in chapters 3 and 4, the report includes a chapter providing an overview of Voice grant making (chapter 2) and Voice spending (chapter 5). The report concludes with chapter 6 outlining the emotions, inspirations and unfulfilled aspirations that come with an 8-year programme.

As ever, this report is dedicated to the rightsholder groups who have given meaning to Voice. It is our fervent wish that your voices resound forevermore.



Karina Tungari [<https://karinatungari.com/>]





## CHAPTER 02

Over the years, Voice's grant-making processes were continually refined to address diverse needs and adapt to changing contexts.

# HOW, WHAT AND

This commitment to learning ensured that funding decisions not only empowered rightsholders but also strengthened Voice's approach to inclusive and responsive grant-making.

# WHERE WE FUNDED



# THE GRANTING PROCESS AND FUNDING PRIORITIES

Voice's funding approach was designed to prioritise adaptability when supporting rightsholders in their (self-) empowerment journeys, while maintaining consistency, transparency, and accountability. Every funding decision was based on the following priorities:



## Prioritising Rightsholder-Led and Inclusive Projects.

Voice prioritised projects that were planned and led by rightsholders themselves. This ensured that each project addressed the needs of rightsholder groups directly, fostering ownership, agency, and more sustainable results.



## Offering Diverse Grant Types

Although at times prospective applicants found these categories to be rigid, Voice employed four main grant types to accommodate a wide range of project types, goals and contexts. These grant modalities, inspired by the spectrum of pathways encompassed by Voice's Theory of Change (i.e., empower, amplify, and influence), aimed to meet rightsholders in whichever part of their journey towards inclusion: from small-grants for emerging groups taking their first steps to organise themselves, to multi-year funding for large-scale advocacy campaigns or trying new approaches.



## Responsive Calls for Proposals (CfPs)

Voice crafted CfPs each year based on an in-depth analysis of local contexts conducted every other year. Each CfP was tailored to respond to the specific socio-political landscape of the focus countries. For instance, when young people took the streets in mass protests against police brutality in Nigeria under the #EndSARS campaign (i.e. the Special Anti-Robbery Squad SARS), Voice published a sudden opportunity CfP titled "Beyond a Hashtag", to support collective actions to promote and protect the civil and political rights of its rightsholder groups.



## Applying an Intersectional Approach to Funding

Voice's commitment to intersectionality was integral to its funding decisions. Funding often targeted multiple identities within rightsholder groups, which allowed Voice to fund projects of vulnerable groups within already marginalised populations.



## Centring Community Resilience, Innovation, and Long-Term Impact.

Voice sought to prioritise initiatives with clear potential to test innovative approaches and creating lasting impact. For example, the addition of Empowerment Accelerator grants allowed successful projects to widen their scale, while additional funds supported ongoing collaborative efforts within Voice's Communities of Practice, encouraging joint actions that strengthened rightsholder ecosystems and sustained advocacy beyond the life of each grant.



## REACHING OUT TO COMMUNITIES

Voice prioritised inclusive and accessible outreach strategies. To connect with communities effectively, Voice collaborated with local organisations and leaders who understood the unique contexts and barriers faced by rightsholders in each country. CfPs were adapted to local languages and distributed through channels, like radio, to overcome literacy and accessibility challenges. In countries like Niger and Tanzania, Voice also leveraged partnerships with grassroots networks to reach remote communities and less visible rightsholders.

By engaging directly with community networks, Voice was able to gather insights into local priorities, which shaped the content and structure of CfPs. This proactive outreach approach not only increased application rates from underrepresented groups but also strengthened trust and transparency within communities. In Indonesia, for instance, Voice partnered with feminist online platforms like *Magdalene*, a widely respected publication among local human rights activists. Together, they produced a podcast for **101 Discussions to spotlight the Power in Activism CfP**, effectively amplifying its reach and engaging diverse voices.



## ACCESSIBILITY IN TECHNOLOGY AND LANGUAGE

Voice recognised the importance of making its processes accessible to rightsholders with diverse technological skills and language needs. Since the start of the programme, the Voice team developed and experimented with simple grant application formats in local languages, audio and video applications and reports. To bridge digital divides, Voice offered multiple ways to engage with application processes, including offline options where internet access was limited. For example, in areas with low digital connectivity such as remote areas in Tanzania and Kenya, Voice worked with local partners to support in-person application assistance.

Accessibility was equally prioritised. For example, disability-sensitive audits were conducted to ensure that the Voice official website, templates, and communications were compatible with reading assistive technology and met accessibility standards. In multilingual contexts, such as in Laos and Nigeria, materials were provided in both national and widely spoken local languages.

## SUPPORTING PARTNERS THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION CYCLE

Voice's support extended beyond funding, actively guiding partners throughout the project implementation process. Voice prioritized regular engagement with grantee partners, including frequent check-ins and monitoring visits. These interactions

provided opportunities to offer tailored support, address emerging challenges, and guide partners through processes such as requesting contractual amendments, realigning project timelines, and adjusting strategies to better suit evolving circumstances. Voice also tackled critical issues, including promoting organisational integrity, safeguarding, supporting partners in engaging with international advocacy efforts, and helping them navigate unforeseen disruptions, ensuring their projects remained on track and impactful.



Marinke van Riet, first Programme Manager of Voice

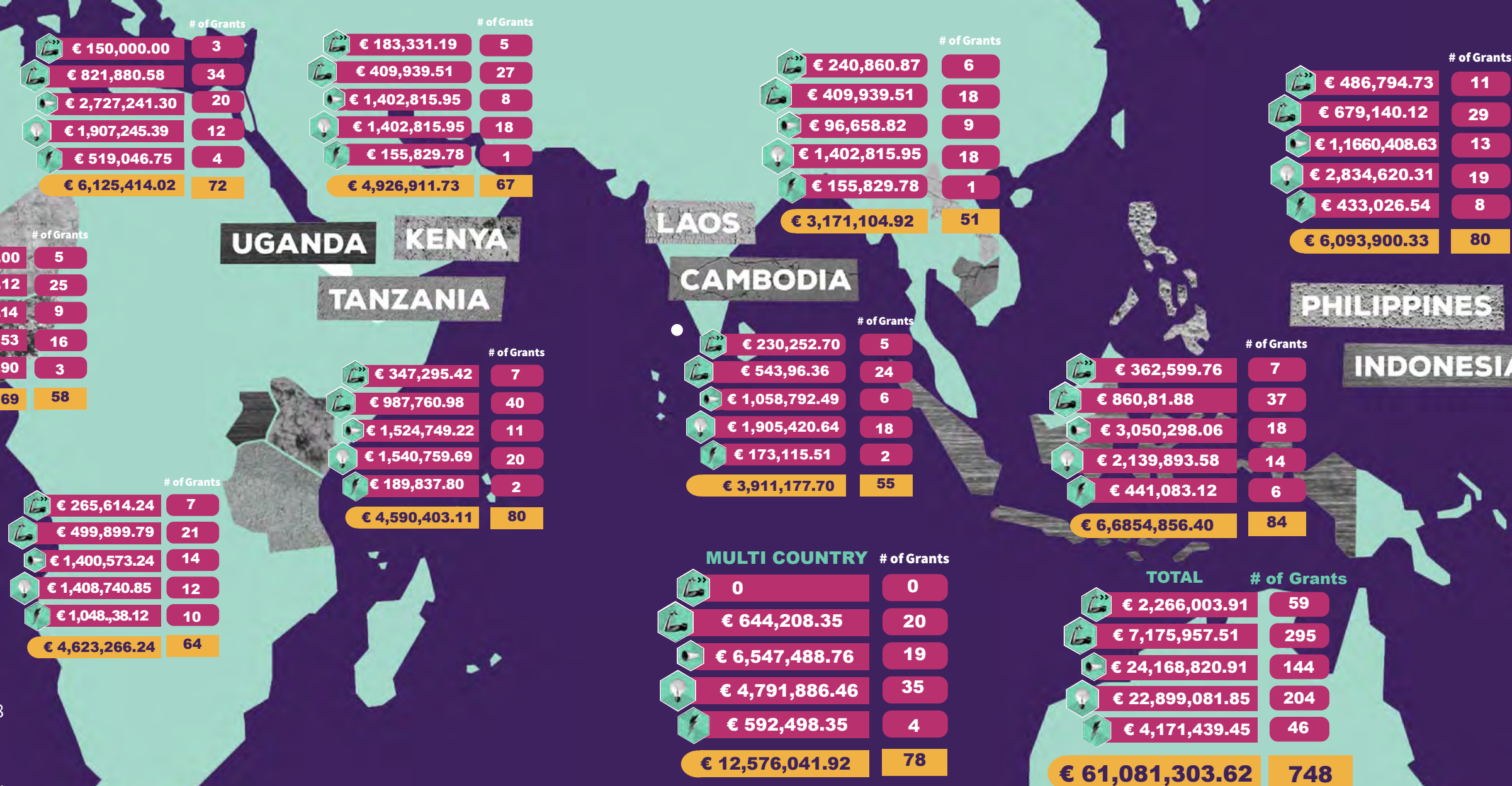


## WHAT WE FUNDED

By the end of 2024, Voice supported 748 projects, representing €60 million in approvals. These funds were allocated through 223 calls for proposals for which we received over 8450 funding applications and ultimately approved 8.65% of them. All this in the midst of a general backsliding in democracy and civic space, an unprecedented global pandemic, and various sociopolitical crises both in the North and Global South.

The final grant distribution and allocation of grants show the clear trends that were established over the lifecycle of the programme:

**Table 1:** Overview of Approved Grants (Number and Amount in Euros) by Country and Grant Type, 2016-2024. Data compiles as of July 2025, prior to the final audit of Voice. Final figures may be subject to minor adjustment upon completion of audit



**The Influencing and Innovate & Learn grants received the largest portion of funds (40% and 37%, respectively).**

The projects supported under these types of grants were normally implemented over 2 to 3 years and often implemented by consortia of organisations with higher operational costs.

**Empowerment Grants, while receiving only 16% of the total funding value, accounted for 47% of the total number of grants.** This is a clear reflection of Voice's strategic priority of using smaller grants to support a larger number of grassroots rightsholder-led initiatives.

**In terms of country allocations, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Uganda stand out as major recipients, with each receiving over €5 million in cumulative funding, in part due to the diversity and strength of local civil society.** Multi-country projects represent the largest single allocation (€12.5 million), also due to the nature of the supported projects focusing on long-term advocacy by regional organisations that could meet more stringent requirements to manage and implement cross-border projects.

It is important to mention that within the total portfolio, **43 projects were classified as confidential to ensure safety and security of rightsholders and Voice teams operating in increasingly hostile civic environments.** This number also includes 14 other projects, less than 1.5% of the total portfolio, presenting financial irregularities.



# GRANT-MAKING TARGETS

The allocation and distribution of grants was guided by grant-making targets jointly decided with the MFA at the start of the programme. These targets were updated annually to address emerging contextual needs per country/region or to prioritise support for seemingly unattended rightsholder groups or thematic impact areas. The table below shows these targeted grant-allocations vis-à-vis the realised numbers:

## RIGHTSHOLDER GROUPS

CATEGORIES	TARGET	REALISED 2024
People with disabilities	20%	22%
LGBTI people	10%	12%
Women facing exploitation, abuse and violence	25%	25%
Vulnerable Youth and Elderly	25%	24%
Indigenous people and ethnic minorities	20%	17%

## GRANT MODALITIES

CATEGORIES	TARGET	REALISED 2024
Empowerment grant (including Emp accelerator grant)	14%	16%
Influencing grant	46%	40%
Innovate and learn grant	26%	37%
Sudden Opportunity Grant	14%	7%

# TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

CATEGORIES	TARGET	REALISED 2024
Informal organisations (grassroots & CBOs)	23%	12%
Formal organisations	50%	80%
Platforms and networks	27%	8%

## THEMES

CATEGORIES	TARGET	REALISED 2024
Access to productive resources and employment	35%	25%
Access to improved social services	35%	36%
Space for political participation	30%	38%

Voice’s performance against the above targets shows success in engaging key rightsholder groups, such as people with disabilities (22%) and LGBTQI individuals (12%), exceeding set targets. Similarly, thematic goals around political participation (38%) and access to social services (36%) were surpassed. However, allocation targets for Indigenous peoples (20% targeted vs. 17% realised) and grassroots/informal organisations (23% targeted vs. 12% realised) fell short, highlighting barriers in reaching more remote groups and legal and organisational barriers impacting Voice’s ability to give grants to unregistered civil society initiatives.



# WHAT WE LEARNED

Voice has prided itself on being a learning-oriented programme. For this final report, the Voice team took the opportunity to pause, reflect, and document their key learnings as implementers over the past eight years. While this need for reflection had been acknowledged in the past, 2024 provided an ideal moment to undertake this exercise as the programme drew to a close.

The reflection process began in May 2024, when all Voice team members were invited to pose critical learning questions they most wanted to explore. From these individual contributions, we identified recurring themes. These themes were further unpacked through mind mapping and virtual discussions held between June and August 2024. The process culminated in September 2024, during Voice's Final Annual Reflection Meeting, where two days were dedicated to developing case studies and in-depth reflections on specific sub-topics under each theme. This process resulted in written outputs from the Voice team that were then collated under the six key sections below: trust, accountability, capacity strengthening,

learning and innovation, linking and learning, and sustainability.

The insights presented in this section capture the collective experiences and lessons of the Voice team, shaped by guidance from the steering committee and advisory board. Some sub-topics, such as inception workshops, conversation-based reporting, and communities of practice, appear in multiple chapters as they illuminate different facets or reinforce key lessons learned. These reflections provide a rich understanding of Voice's journey and the principles that guided its implementation, offering valuable insights for future programmes seeking to foster inclusion, trust, and systemic change.



# VOICE'S APPROACH TO CULTIVATING TRUST IN PARTNERSHIPS

*Based on case studies and reflections offered by Abdoul Rachid, Siska Noya, Gian Prastiwi, Thena Posysenthong, Clemens Wennekes, Korotimi Dackouo, Christine Namatovu, Faith Sera, Kayla Lapiz, Bolane Noble, Souchinda Siyavong, and Joseph Dourame Abdoukarim*

The Voice grant-making facility began as an act of trust—a EUR 60 million commitment from the Netherlands MFA to Oxfam Novib and Hivos to ensure development funding reached those most left behind. Since 2016, the Voice team has worked to honour this trust by continuously adapting its ways of working to meet rightsholders where they are, in grant-making and L&L.

Voice's L&L has been a cornerstone of relationship-building with and among grantee partners, from the programme's early years through to its conclusion, as highlighted in the 2023 final evaluation. From the start, Voice prioritized serving rightsholders based on their expressed needs, reflecting on its own practices to align with principles of inclusion and accessibility. Interestingly, trust as an explicit value gained prominence only after the 2019 mid-term review, which recognized Oxfam and Hivos as “trusted social rights activists who have been able to mobilize applications” and the added value of Voice as “its demonstrated ability to give practical meaning to the notion “nothing about us, without us” by creating and managing an easily accessible grant funding mechanism”.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the MFA announced a commitment pause for the year, preventing Voice from awarding any new grants. This decision tested the credibility and trust the programme had built, as grantee partners and rightsholders looked to Voice for support during an unprecedented global crisis. However, through close collaboration with the Ministry, the Voice team worked out solutions to once again respond to the realities and necessities of grantee partners within the possibilities provided by the tender framework setting up Voice.

The consequence— a staggering 200 grant contract amendments to provide no-cost extensions and other budget adjustments to grantee partners. This experience exemplifies the core of Voice's approach to trust-building in grant-making. The Voice grant management system—rooted in the operational frameworks of Oxfam and Hivos—are primarily designed to ensure financial accountability. This follows from the laws under which the programme was established by the Dutch government. While essential for transparency and compliance, this created challenges in fully realising the programme's intent to function as a trust-based and participatory grant facility.



Wrapping up the workshop with group photos from Africa team.



Voicers from Asia during a morning mindfulness practice



From 2020 onwards, the Voice teams engaged in deliberate reflections on their individual and collective capacity to foster trust-based relationships with grantee partners. **A key realization emerged: the use of language plays a central role in creating equal, open, and trusting partnerships.** In response, Voice adopted hope-based communications as a way to centre positivity in its interactions with all stakeholders. This period also marked a renewed focus on the potential of L&L as a tool to enhance grant-making practices. To further understand and improve these dynamics, Voice supported by the Hewlett

Foundation, partnered with the Center for Effective Philanthropy to conduct an anonymous Grantee Perception Survey in 2021. Based on the survey results, the team committed to actionable changes that aligned with the recommendations, reinforcing Voice's commitment to trust-based practices and equitable relationships with its grantee partners.

Voice experienced varying levels of success in fulfilling such commitments. **Efforts such as implementing an annual feedback survey to systematically gather partner input, rolling out conversation-based reporting, and conducting the so-called “Mindful Inclusion” capacity-strengthening workshops for the Voice team demonstrated progress in improving interactions with grantee partners.** However, some aspirations, like creating a standard user experience checklist and establishing more frequent, proactive communication across the board,

remained unrealised. This led Voice to a critical realization: building trust-based and meaningful relationships requires dedicated time and focus. How much deeper could connections with grantee partners have been if less time had been consumed by the administrative and financial demands of grant management? While the final evaluation report highlighted that Voice's open communication platforms fostered understanding and trust, it also included testimony from a grantee partner that reflected a different perspective, underscoring the complexity and nuances of trust-building in grant-making relationships:

**“VOICE SHOULD TRY WORKING ON THE BASIS OF TRUST AND, AND SIMPLIFY PROCESSES AND DUE DILIGENCE, ESPECIALLY FOR EXISTING PARTNERS.”**

**Voice has played a critical role in supporting smaller CSOs, including many in their start-up phase, several of which received their first-ever grants through the programme.** For these organisations, the organisational due diligence process was often seen not merely as a requirement but as an opportunity to strengthen their structures and build credibility, enabling them to secure additional funding from other sources. Conversely, more established CSOs challenged Voice to improve its practices as a funder. They called for a more trust-based approach, greater acknowledgment of power dynamics, and more mindful communication. As Dumiso Gatsha, a member of the Voice Advisory Board, aptly noted, Voice exemplifies how bilateral funding can be stretched to achieve meaningful impact. However, this success has not come easily. The programme has operated within the constraints of strict legal requirements and rigorous financial management systems. Despite these challenges, the dedication and resilience of the Voice teams—deeply connected to their communities and driven by a shared passion—have been pivotal in advancing the programme's core value of inclusion.

**The following examples from Voice team members illustrate how trust was cultivated in relationships with grantee partners.**

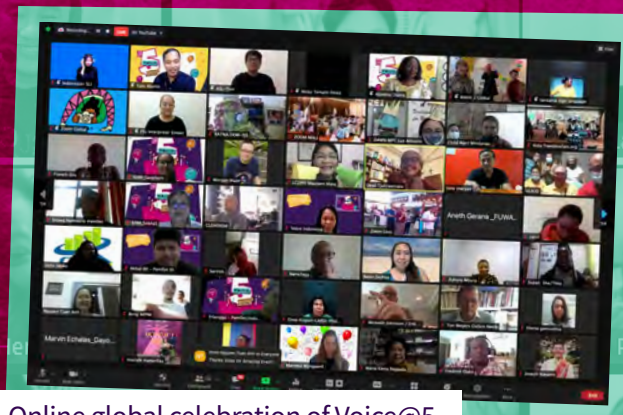
Kenneth Jura shares his Magic moment where he discovered his blind spots during a Mindful Inclusion Workshop in East Africa



## ESTABLISHING TRUST THROUGH DIRECT ENGAGEMENT

In Mali, Voice built trust with grantee partners like the **Association of Women Living with Disabilities of Koulikoro** through specific visits and coaching. Initially, the organisation faced challenges, including the lack of legal registration. Rather than disqualifying them due to this hurdle, Voice provided support and reassurance, resulting in successful registration and project execution. The president of the association expressed gratitude, noting how Voice's support transformed their operational capacity. This approach highlights that fostering trust often requires patience, understanding, and a commitment to partnership.

Similarly, in Indonesia, Voice recognised the challenges its grantee partners faced in articulating their stories within rigid reporting frameworks, particularly given their diverse backgrounds. To address this, Voice piloted conversation-based reporting, enabling partners to share their narratives in culturally relevant and accessible ways. This approach not only enriched the data collected but also fostered deeper trust and stronger relationships built on mutual respect. The feedback loop created through these conversations encouraged grantee partners to openly discuss both their challenges and successes. This method proved especially valuable for Empowerment grantees, allowing them to highlight their achievements alongside the obstacles they encountered.



Online global celebration of Voice@5



Voice Process Cafe

## ADAPTING TO DIGITAL REALITIES

The global nature of Voice meant that many interactions, particularly with multi-country grantee partners started occurring online, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, the Voice team members did their best to meet the multi-country partners in-person with mixed success. Once the pandemic brought in-person interactions to a halt, the finance coordinator shifted from impersonal email exchanges to individualised online meetings to discuss financial queries. **This change was well-received by grantee partners, who appreciated the opportunity to discuss concerns and clarify reporting obligations in a supportive environment.**

## LINKING & LEARNING: COMMUNITY BUILDING

**L&L initiatives aimed to bring grantee partners together for mutual empowerment and shared advocacy.** This effort began with a centralised approach, which evolved into a more inclusive model where country teams co-created learning agendas with input from partners. The introduction of *Kamustahan* (which is a Tagalog term for checking-in or asking how one another is doing) activities in the Philippines illustrated how simple acts of care could nurture trust. **As partners engaged in these spaces, they began to collaborate on innovative projects, further solidifying their relationships.**

In Laos, Communities of Practice (COPs) emerged as platforms for young organisations to learn from more established peers. This collaborative learning environment not only strengthened capacities but also built trust among participants, reinforcing the idea that collective efforts could lead to impactful change. Projects initiated through COPs, such as those addressing the needs of disabled youth and creating safe spaces for dialogue, exemplified the power of trust in driving meaningful action.

Laos Country in Focus



Forum Theatre activity of the Voice Laos closure event in 2024



## TRUST-BUILDING AS A PROCESS

Trust-building has been critical to fostering effective collaboration and advocacy. Through personalised engagement, responsive reporting practices, digital communication, and community-building activities, Voice moved towards implementing strategies aimed at cultivating trust with partners. The experiences demonstrate that trust is not merely a byproduct of successful interactions; it is an ongoing commitment to understanding and supporting one another in the pursuit of shared goals.

As the Programme closes out, making bilateral funds go the mile is surely being celebrated. However, there is still the discomfort of knowing that, trust has not been the locus of the relationship with grantee partners. A rhetorical and possibly existential question remains- in moving towards trust-based grant making, should grant-makers (such as Voice) be naming the roots of the lack of trust that currently exists in funding relationships?



## VOICE'S APPROACH TO ENSURING (MUTUAL) ACCOUNTABILITY

*Based on case studies and reflections offered by Kahlille Seranilla, Oumaima Ouassa, Garry Mugar, Milly Tiwangye, and Aida Toye.*

In 2015, when Hivos and Oxfam collaborated to submit a proposal to the Netherlands MFA for the establishment and management of Voice, they envisioned a fund guided by accountability and local ownership. The proposal stated that **“VOICE will be led by the ambitions and opinions of the most marginalised and discriminated groups.”** This vision aligned with the MFA's goal of advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 10. The proposal outlined four key accountability mechanisms: **transparency, participation, monitoring and learning, and feedback.**

### ACCOUNTABILITY



was further defined in 2016, when the Voice team developed its results framework, as *“the process by which we develop balanced and respectful relationships with all of our stakeholders, enabling them to hold Voice to account for its commitments and decisions.”* This commitment involved incorporating the needs of rightsholders, communities of practice, and stakeholders into decision-making and activities, ensuring inclusive outcomes.

Voice's accountability efforts, however, faced inherent tensions. While sensitive and innovative approaches aimed to meet the realities of diverse civil society organisations, particularly informal or nascent groups, these had to be balanced against the need to minimize risks, prevent fraud, and maintain rigorous financial accountability. Despite these challenges, the programme's commitment to being guided by rightsholders remained steadfast, serving as its North Star.

### MONITORING AND LEARNING



also featured prominently. Early initiatives like the **“Entries of the Empowered”**, a journaling-based study, captured rightsholders' personal testimonies in Cambodia, Mali, and Tanzania were designed to help answer the higher-level learning questions of the programme in 2018-2019. From 2021 onward, participatory workshops using outcome harvesting became the primary method for gathering monitoring data. These workshops, which helped grantee partners identify successes and improve storytelling, were widely appreciated.



### FEEDBACK MECHANISM

gained renewed focus during the extension phase, with the introduction of the first Grantee Perception Survey in 2021, conducted annually thereafter. Open and transparent communication with stakeholders was repeatedly recognized as critical to building trust and mutual accountability.

The reflections below capture how the Voice team worked to cultivate mutual accountability, demonstrating their commitment to inclusive, transparent, and responsive relationships with grantee partners.

### TRANSPARENCY



Transparency was a cornerstone of Voice's accountability. The programme adhered to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and the Dutch Freedom of Information Act (*Wet Openbaarheid Bestuur, WOB*), with financial flows and grantee information reported via Oxfam's Atlas online portal and the Voice official website, which were kept 'live' by entering data in Oxfam Novib's Management Information System. In addition, the Voice website has been the main medium for ensuring transparent communication with prospective and existing partners, through the publication of calls for proposals throughout the programme life cycle, information on the grant selection process and frequently asked questions (FAQs) in the early years, and information about programme closure and the steps involved towards the end.

### PARTICIPATION



was equally integral. A notable example was the development of biannual context analysis reports, which shaped calls for proposals and deepened engagement with rightsholders and grantee partners. Over time, the programme increasingly emphasized listening and learning before speaking, a key lesson in fostering mutual accountability.



Mwanamke na Uongozi Organization unveils their plan to mobilize and train 30 young women from diverse political parties, inspiring a wave of female participation in politics ahead of the October 2020 General Election



## INCEPTION WORKSHOPS

Once projects started, we introduced a first organisational visit to refresh the inception basics at the 6-month mark, just before first reports were to be submitted. Through this we acknowledged that during the inception workshops not always the actual people responsible for project implementation and thus narrative financial reporting were present.

The inception workshops for new grantee partners were a critical step in fostering a culture of accountability within their operations. These sessions provided clear and practical guidance on managing funds, meeting reporting requirements, and maintaining transparency throughout the project lifecycle. Grantee partners were thoroughly introduced to their

contractual obligations, learning how to manage budgets, adhere to timelines, and maintain comprehensive records effectively. In Indonesia, the Linking & Learning Facilitator organisations (LLF) played a vital role by welcoming new grantee partners into the Voice network at the national level and encouraging active participation in the L&L activities.

The workshops promoted a spirit of collaboration, emphasizing that all parties were equal partners in achieving project goals. Individual follow-up meetings further deepened trust, offering grantee partners a safe space to express their needs and concerns. This approach cultivated a sense of ownership and responsibility, laying the groundwork for strong, supportive partnerships built on mutual respect and transparency.

The inception workshops also highlighted the grantee partners' responsibilities toward the communities they serve. Voice encouraged partners to work collaboratively with local duty-bearers and stakeholders, ensuring that projects were conducted transparently and with respect for those directly impacted. By aligning their efforts with the needs and priorities of the most vulnerable, grantee partners not only built trust within communities but also reinforced their accountability to the rightsholders they represented.

## REPORTING

The reporting process at Voice is a key mechanism for accountability, initially designed to be flexible within the Ministry's requirements while enhancing partners' capacity in project and financial management. Early implementation revealed that the reporting demands were often too burdensome for partners. In response to evolving discussions

around trust-based grant making and #ShiftThePower, Voice made efforts to simplify the reporting process.

These efforts included integrating milestone and progress reports, adjusting reporting templates for ease of use, accepting diverse formats like videos, and discussing revisions to financial report templates, although some changes did not materialise. Partners viewed these adjustments as a sign of Voice's commitment to growth alongside them, leading to improved report quality. However, there had still been a need for further simplification. An unrealised learning within Voice has been the (im)possibility to embrace trust-based accountability, viewing fund transfers as a relinquishment of power rather than mere gifts.



## MONITORING VISITS

Monitoring visits were essential for fostering accountability, learning, and relationship-building. They provided Voice teams with the opportunity to meet grantee partners and rightsholders face-to-face, gather direct feedback on policies and practices, explain the rationale behind programmatic decisions, and collaboratively address challenges. These interactions helped strengthen mutual understanding while deepening Voice's knowledge of local contexts and social dynamics. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, when in-person visits were replaced with virtual engagements, these interactions remained a vital way for Voice to stay connected with grantee partners, for them to report progress on their initiatives, and for all Voice teams to adapt to emerging needs.

For example, during a visit to a youth political participation project in Maradi, Niger, the absence of women's participation was striking, with only two women arriving towards the end of the meeting. To address this, the team organised a separate meeting with women to understand their challenges, leading to the creation of a women's discussion club to share experiences and find solutions. Whether in-person or virtual, these visits have been pivotal in ensuring that Voice remains responsive, adaptive, and engaged with its grantee partners.

## ACCOUNTABILITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF VOICE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS

**Admin/Project Officers (AOs) at Voice have faced challenges in ensuring accountability due to their dependency on other team members, which has affected communication and task execution.** Traditionally excluded from onboarding meetings for new grantee partners, AOs were eventually included, allowing them to better understand their roles and align with team objectives. This involvement had enabled AOs to take greater ownership of their tasks. In the extension phase, the due diligence processes have been clarified, and AOs play supportive roles while upholding accountability to both the team and grantee partners. The experience has highlighted that accountability involves fostering an environment where everyone understands their roles and feels empowered to contribute.

## ACCOMPANIMENT ON FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT TO IMPROVE ACCOUNTABILITY

Voice integrated lessons learned from grant-making to support partners in improving financial management and resilience, which contributed to improving accountability.



### BUDGETING FLEXIBILITY AND REALIGNMENT

Recognising the challenges partners faced in rapidly changing environments, Voice adjusted its budgeting processes to allow flexibility. For instance, during COVID-19, grantee partners could reallocate budgets to cover essential costs like masks, sanitizers, and online engagement tools.



### REFINING FINANCIAL REPORTING FORMATS

Early in the programme, Voice identified that complex financial templates presented challenges for many grantees. To address this, Voice implemented user-friendly updates, including formula-locking to prevent unintentional errors, exchange rate guidance, and auto-updating templates. These innovations made it easier for partners to align reports with approved budgets, reducing errors and improving consistency across financial submissions.



### ENHANCED TRAINING ON BUDGET ALIGNMENT

Based on insights from financial assessments, Voice incorporated budget alignment training into its inception workshops. This training encouraged collaboration between grantee partner finance and program teams, helping them manage budget reallocations effectively. For instance, grantee partners learned to conduct periodic variance analysis, which enhanced accountability and ensured that any discrepancies were identified early.



### IMPROVED REPORTING SUPPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY

Voice's financial officers worked closely with grantee partners to support the budget-to-actual analysis process, making it less rigid and more focused on actual project needs. This included simplifying variance reporting formats and providing grantees with tailored guidance on how to complete reports accurately.

As demonstrated through these reflections, accountability has been a fundamental aspect of relationship building within Voice, alongside trust. Information sharing, mindful communications and accompaniment practices have been ways for the Voice team to offer accountability to partners. The emphasis on rightsholders' leadership and representation has been a way to ensure accountability more broadly to rightsholders.



## 03 VOICE'S APPROACH TO CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

*Based on case studies and reflections offered by Inez Hackenberg, Ishita Dutta, Abdoul Rachid, Siska Noya, Gabriella Coly, Makena Koome, Thena Posysenthong, Clemens Wennekes, Cedric Owuru, Diana Moreka, Christine Namatovu, Milly Tiwangye, Alex Loer, Maureen Mata and Anne Mulehi.*

Capacity strengthening has been a cornerstone of Voice's approach, designed to empower rightsholder groups and CSOs by addressing their self-identified needs rather than those perceived by the programme. This emphasis on partner-led prioritisation ensured that capacity-strengthening efforts were embedded throughout every stage of interaction, from grant application to project completion. Activities included peer-to-peer learning, technical training, organisational capacity assessments and participatory approaches, with a strong focus on enhancing lobby, advocacy, and organisational effectiveness. Through L&L, Voice connected grantees across countries, creating collaborative spaces for exchanging insights, addressing challenges, and sharing innovative approaches.

Voice implemented diverse capacity-strengthening strategies. Inception workshops and tailored technical, financial, and project management guidance were integral to strengthening partner capacities. Smaller organisations, especially NOW-Us! awardees, benefited from fiscal

hosting arrangements, while personalised interactions with the Voice team ensured targeted support. L&L sessions facilitated peer exchanges, enabling organisations to share practical knowledge on topics such as financial management and advocacy strategies. Regional and global learning events, including the NOW-Us! awards, further encouraged collaboration and broader exchanges.

The impact of these efforts was far-reaching. Many organisations implemented stronger internal controls and enhanced their financial capacities, enabling access to additional funding from other donors. CoPs fostered practical knowledge sharing, creating a sense of collective empowerment among participants. Voice's flexibility during the pandemic highlighted the importance of adaptive capacity strengthening, enhancing organisational resilience in challenging times. These initiatives contributed to the sustainability of grantee partners, particularly in areas like governance and resource mobilisation, positioning them for long-term success. However, gaps persisted, particularly for smaller organisations, indicating the need for more structured and tailored support. While Voice significantly improved financial and project management capacities, ongoing attention to these areas will be critical to ensuring the sustained growth and independence of smaller grantees.



Voice Awards 2019

**“Capacity strengthening and capacity enhancement are terms that have been loosely used and over-flogged. This has made it sound like a one-off activity but in our way of working, we recognise it as a series of activities, approaches & events that support grantees and rightsholders to be able to lead and take charge of their advocacy journey. Whether the activity is geared towards attracting donors, putting sustainable mechanisms in place or something as little as story writing, all is geared towards grantees/rightsholders taking their lead. Capacity strengthening is integral to everything we do, in a nutshell, is just like the act of breathing air at this point.”**

**- reflections from LLAOs during the Final Voice Reflection Meeting**



Voice Global NOW-Us Awards 2019





In Kenya, deaf children in library



ERAT Indonesia

## TAILORED CAPACITY-STRENGTHENING

The Deaf Outreach Programme (DEAFOP) in Kenya is a prime example of how Voice's capacity strengthening approach enabled the empowerment of grantee partners. DEAFOP, focused on promoting the rights of the deaf community through accessible technology, received training in pitching and networking, which was reinforced through peer-to-peer practice sessions. The organisation then participated in a L&L event, attending the Reproductive Health Network Conference. There, DEAFOP successfully pitched their work, securing interest from strategic partners and funders. As a result, DEAFOP began collaborating on developing online sign language tools. Similarly, the Ladies' Joint Forum (LJF) in Tanzania, after years of unsuccessful attempts, gained crucial skills on proposal writing and pitching from the NOW-Us! Awards bootcamp. Although they did not secure a grant during the awards process, LJF applied the knowledge gained to successfully secure an Empowerment grant for their "She Goes Digital" project, aimed at empowering women through digital marketing and professional photography skills.

## ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN CAPACITY THROUGHOUT THE GRANT MAKING CYCLE

Voice's rightsholder-centred approach to capacity strengthening was also evident through its support of partners throughout the grant cycle. From preparatory sessions such as "Ask Away" and inception workshops to monitoring visits and reporting assessments, the programme ensured continuous engagement with grantee partners. For instance, in Uganda, the Organization for Community Engagement (OCE) received tailored support in contractual, financial, and programmatic management, earning praise from other donors for its transparency. Love Is Diversity (LID), an emerging Cambodian LGBTQI group hosted by SILAKA, also saw growth in their project management and fundraising capabilities, allowing them to apply for new funding from other funders.

## LINKING & LEARNING: COMMUNITY BUILDING

ERAT Indonesia Bahagia, a small organisation in Indonesia promoting the rights of elderly transwomen elderly to access healthcare, received extensive support from Voice during their registration process, financial assessments, and reporting. They were also included in training sessions conducted by Hivos Southeast Asia, now known as Yayasan Humanis dan Inovasi Sosial, leading to their full registration as an organisation in 2019, advocating for elderly rights. In Laos, a L&L session focused on financial topics helped strengthen the capacities of finance officers (FOs). Similarly, Voice Uganda and Niger used monitoring visits to provide financial training and address financial management queries. Voice also encouraged grantee partners to allocate budgets for capacity-strengthening activities in their project proposals.

## TRUST-BUILDING AS A PROCESS

Voice's capacity-strengthening efforts also faced several challenges. One recurring issue was differing opinions within the Voice team on what capacity strengthening truly entails and what is its scope. Additionally, capacity-strengthening efforts were often influenced by the skills, capacity, and interest of country teams, which could be limiting. Also, many partners struggled with high staff turnover, which meant that knowledge was not always successfully transferred and multiple capacity-strengthening sessions were required. Furthermore, limited documentation of methodologies across different Voice focus countries contributed less support toward cross-learning and collaboration. These challenges suggest a need for clearer definitions, more structured processes, and better documentation to enhance the effectiveness of capacity strengthening in the future. Finally, budget constraints also made it difficult to provide consistent capacity-building support. However, the use of online sessions proved to be a cost-efficient alternative, enabling wider participation without significant costs.

These specific examples demonstrate how Voice's capacity strengthening efforts, despite some challenges, supported partners' abilities to advocate for rightsholder groups, improve organisational capacities, and secure long-term sustainability.



## VOICE'S APPROACH TO LEARNING AND INNOVATION

*Based on case studies and reflections offered by Thena Posysenthong, Saophorn Phoeng, Chindamani Homphasathane, and Siska Noya*

Learning and innovation are two big words within Voice, especially in practice. How does Voice define learning? What is innovation? While the two are different concepts, they are most definitely connected.

Learning is mostly linked to the L&L component. At the start of Voice, L&L was considered a new or foreign concept for most rightsholder groups and grantee partners. Something that either was too technical or simply that not many funders allow to be covered under project-based financing. Along the way, Voice defined it in much simpler and “jargon-free” terms, which still maintained its depth—purposefully created spaces for mutual empowerment. **Ambitiously, it aimed to produce evidence and innovative solutions to catalyse transformative change for rightsholders. It hoped for the result of these peer-to-peer actions to grow and continue even after the programme ends.** There never was a “Voice definition” of learning. Instead, it was seen as part of everything and as a dynamic process, as the programme intended to

create spaces for learning throughout the programme cycle. It also promoted learning through resource allocation, storytelling and strengthening capabilities.

On the other hand, Innovation was defined through its purpose— to effectively create or explore non-traditional and uncalibrated methods and instruments. Voice also emphasised how **innovation differs per context and how it can take various forms such as involving non-traditional actors, making use of new technologies, engaging in different partnerships, making use of new scientific knowledge.** These bits and pieces are pulled from the Voice Process Manual, the Final Evaluation Report, and the Voice@5 Learning document.



West African partners unite during a Knowledge Exchange in Nigeria



# MAKING AND TAKING SPACES TO LEARN AND INNOVATE

The manifestation of these two concepts emerged in different spaces within Voice, but top-of-mind as an example, is the L&L process. This report contains a separate reflection on L&L. In this part we have sought to present an overview of how it is seen as the main driver of learning and innovation.

The L&L trajectory and its facilitation is a learning process in itself. During the early phase of promoting and practicing L&L, there was a struggle to reach common ground with all

grantee partners across the differences in contexts, cultures, needs and interests. **One of the greatest learning is on shifting the perception about L&L from being activity-based to process-thinking.** This shift was not easy but it had its own milestones, such as the vibrant CoPs in Nigeria where different groups actively co-created spaces joint learning. One has expressed their intention to continue their CoP focused on advancing the rights of people with disabilities and the elderly.

Another example is from Cambodia, where different groups flourished and took time to engage in capacity-strengthening initiatives, even appointing focal persons to co-facilitate initiatives.

Within grant making, **learning and innovation took place from developing calls for proposals, doing outreach initiatives, and reporting.** Starting with grants management, Voice teams through learning and reflecting on grant cycles, came up with adaptive approaches specific to country and community contexts.

The Empowerment grant type in itself proved to be an innovative approach within the programme, as it targeted groups that are usually hardest to reach, or are perceived to be loose/informal and those who have less or

no prior experience of handling grant funds and implementing projects. Learning along the way, the Empowerment Accelerator grant was developed and launched, seeing the need of Empowerment partners to continue what has been started and their readiness to explore further. In Tanzania, through the Lareto Co-operative Society LTD, an informal Maasai women’s group used the grant to advocate for women’s access to land, which was crucial for their economic empowerment. This effort led to the formation of ongoing support groups that continue to operate beyond Voice’s involvement. Similarly in Laos, Takienglao, a women-led organisation that initially worked through local volunteers expanded its initiative to new regions under the Empowerment Accelerator grant.



“Peer-to-peer learning has proven transformative by enabling grantees to tap into the collective knowledge and experiences of their peers, equipping them to be more effective advocates for their rights. Linking & Learning has enabled subnational, national, and cross-border collaboration, exposing grantees and rightsholders to new perspectives and innovative strategies. This exposure empowered them to tackle issues that transcend the confines of their organisations and countries, drawing on diverse experiences.”

- Voice Final Evaluation Report



“The partners tested new approaches and techniques to programming, increasing their interactions with each other through our proud culture of Linking and Learning and celebrated their achievements, successes, and shortcomings.”

- 2023 Voice Annual Report: The Voices we Uphold



The use of art as a tool for advocacy is also evident as an innovative approach among rightsholder groups across countries. In Indonesia, noticing this trend led the team to develop a call for proposal focused on Artivism. Through this, Sanggar Seroja facilitated the use of theatre as a tool for advocacy by the transgender community.

They gained support from art communities and other rightsholders. Another example is from Laos, where WECARE, co-created safe spaces for youth, people with disability and LGBTQI individuals to share concerns and untold stories of stigmatization. They did this through a “Mental Health Hackathon”, a volunteers’ training on listening and watching out for signs of depression, self-care workshops, and the creation of a web series of stories from people facing mental illness.

**Within Voice a trajectory on mindfulness, later called “Mindful Inclusion”, was also explored.** This journey was inspired by partner projects like those aforementioned (and more), and the commitment of Voice to its values and principles. This journey was taken even more seriously during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was not only Voice who responded, but the grantee partners, as well. It was a rather steep learning trajectory, but a key takeaway from such experience is intentionality and the importance of co-creation in every space being opened.

**The last highlight of an innovative approach that came through the learning process is the importance of having a rightsholder-centred approach.** While Voice could not claim that it has mastered this, it strived to understand and practice what this approach means. One of the areas where this has been exhibited most significantly is the NOW-Us! Awards.

The NOW-Us! Awards celebrate innovation in inclusion and were jointly launched by Voice and Partos at the 2018 Partos Innovation Festival. Seeing the rightsholder-led innovation in action on a global stage catalysed the idea of scaling up the awards nationally to each of the Voice focus countries. It has been positively and enthusiastically received by organisations, showing how it might be used as a standard granting procedure for small, informal groups and organisations.

There were several NOW-Us Initiatives by the rightsholders which allowed Voice to support more inclusive and innovative initiatives, including LGBTQI storytelling via contemporary dance led by Fanglao in Laos, and the preservation of indigenous identity through documentation and integrating the SDGs into the local languages of the indigenous communities in Tanzania, led by Oltoito Le Maa. Starting as a NOW-Us! Global award winner in 2018 from outside a Voice focus country- Vietnam, PARD Vietnam, an emerging group of deaf activists working to further develop Vietnamese sign language, not only formally registered as the first ever deaf-led civil society organisation in the country in 2019, but also launched the “DeafLoud” project, integrating a NOW-Deaf Awards in their activities for 2022 and 2023 to foster a culture of innovation within the deaf community in the Mekong Region.





## A PROCESS, A CYCLE, AND A STEP FORWARD

The examples above are a few highlights of what Voice learned and tested out, internally and along with grantee partners and rightsholders. But what have these resulted in, or how have these affected the programme and the people? Were there shifts in understanding and reflection?

After eight years of figuring things out together, Voice folks reflected on these two big words and highlighted the way they see learning and innovation as they worked together as teams, with grantee partners and rightsholders:

### Learning can happen at any point along the cycle of programme/project implementation

and it is a continuous process that leads to adapting to changing contexts. Learning transparently shares failures and cultivates a culture of continuous improvement.

### Learning is beyond acquiring knowledge, it is important to put it into practice.

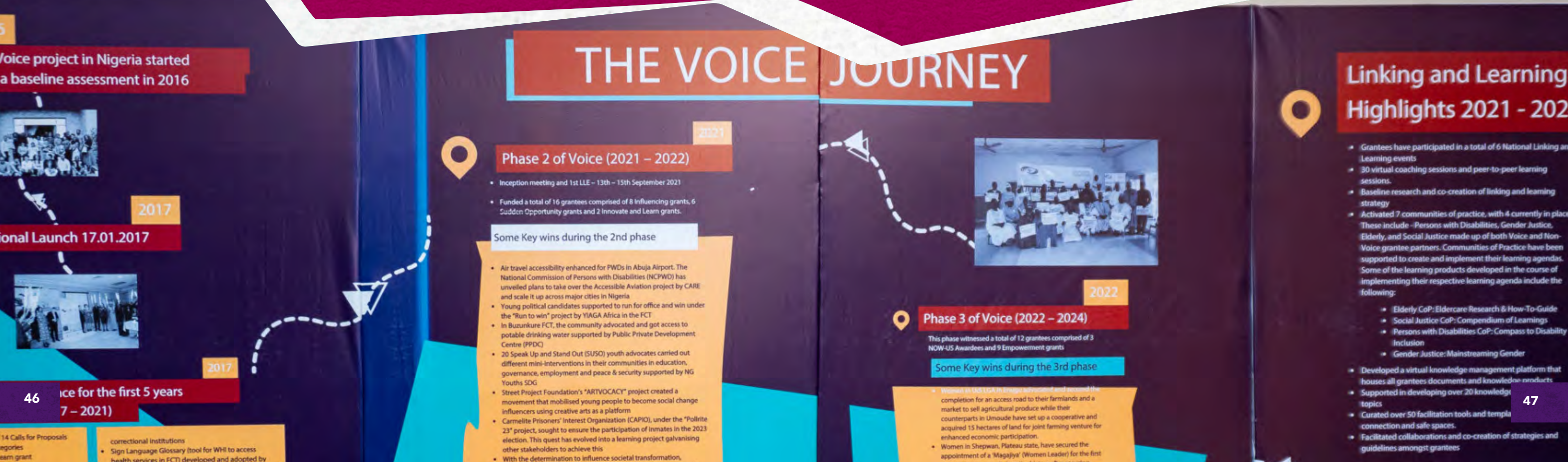
Innovation is context-driven and requires an intersectional perspective. Hence it may not be out of the ordinary for all, but may be for a particular group or context. Innovation is purposive and geared towards change or a significant impact. Both are seen as actions to level-up.

The **impact of learning and innovating** within Voice is not merely seen through the wins and positive changes, but more importantly, the **continued commitment and increased value given to it—by Voice,** by grantee partners, and by rightsholders.

**Making spaces to learn and innovate, supporting each others' empowerment, and carrying the experiences and motivation** as we all move forward might be the biggest intention these two words, in practice, have achieved.

**While appreciating the “formal” learning opportunities offered by Voice, it is the opinion of several Voice staff and grantees that peer-to-peer learning should be the default capacity-strengthening methodology of Voice, as it empowers rightsholders, while also increasing future sustainability through sharing and learning.”**

- Voice Final Evaluation Report





## VOICE'S APPROACH TO LINKING & LEARNING

*Based on case studies and reflections offered by Inez Hackenberg, Thena Posysenthong, Cedric Owuru, Milly Tiwangye, Saophorn Phoeng, Fati Yabilan, Makena Koome, Namcheja Maghembe, Giany Amorita, Kayla Lapiz, and Agnes Doubahan Dembele*

In April 2016, Voice started the L&L journey with words; words scattered throughout the Voice programme document, describing in somewhat technical jargon what L&L within the Voice programme could look like. Along the way it has taken the shape of an approach. Not a blueprint and not a detailed methodology. So, what makes it distinctive? Nothing and yet everything. It is unique as it was co-created within Voice together with grantee partners around a set of ideas. Yet, nothing that was done hasn't been done or thought of before. Yet, the combination of different activities, the way of facilitating and the connection and relationships that grew between people, have enabled amazing personal and organisational changes.

A lot of it has been about process and space. These are spaces where relationships can grow beyond one's functions and formal roles and projects. Where everyone has things to contribute and learn. Where failures and things that didn't work out well are a source of learning, innovation, and growth. And where status and

titles disappear in the background and humanness, empathy, and connection foregrounds.

Voice ventured in creating the L&L component bottom-up with LLFs being contracted in each country, co-creating the L&L actions with grantees partners and Voice. This allowed for ongoing and simultaneous engagement in all countries and for interactions to be led by the context rather than a centrally guided learning process.

The more Voice embraced the values and principles like "Nothing About Us Without Us", participation and inclusion, the more it was realised that the changes had to start at an individual level. **Voice made changes to its ways of communicating, facilitating and decision-making on L&L activities. It asked for openness, curiosity, reflection, and willingness to question our practices and to un-learn what did not work.**

“

**IT CALLED FOR TOTAL INDIVIDUAL TRANSFORMATION, INCLUDING ADOPTING A NEW MINDSET, UNLEARNING SEVERAL ATTITUDES AND WAYS OF WORK, AND LEARNING NEW APPROACHES AND METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT. ONE OF THE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES WAS TO LISTEN MORE THAN TALK TO BE ABLE TO ALLOW GRANTEES' IDEAS AND PERSPECTIVES TO THRIVE.**

”

- Edith Nantongo, Strategic Links, Linking and Learning Facilitator (LLF) in Uganda





YGoal, Linking and Learning Facilitator in the Philippines, reading a poem during its 2019 L&L event

## L&L: A requirement, a burden, or a value-adding process?

The perception towards the L&L component evolved over the years. The first phase was more exploratory and focused on trust-building. As the gradual shift happened towards understanding L&L not as an activity but as a process, key aspects of it started to emerge: based on consultation and founded on co-creation, weaved together in a way that it flows organically within the grantee partners' organisations and projects, and ways of working. L&L became a part of what people/organisations do, a reflective way of working, from looking inward to looking outward, without losing the need to root it constantly in the reality of the participating rightsholders.

## Breaking the silos: From vertical to 'horizontal siloing'.

Although at times useful and necessary, thinking and working in vertical silos, separating groups and actions based on predefined criteria tends to separate rather than unite. So, how did L&L work in a way that would create horizontal connections between everybody in the learning spaces? This question was posed and intersectionality was embraced throughout the process. Open spaces were co-created where participants take the lead, creating opportunities to join forces and collaborate.



Love is Diveristy and Women Peace Makers hosted a special screening program of a video sharing the real-life journeys of gay couples and the beauty of building loving families in Cambodia.

## Breaking through exclusion and onward to self-advocacy.

The different L&L spaces have been conducive to the emergence of some amazing self-advocates. There are examples where the L&L supported people to overcome their self-exclusion by breaking through self-imposed or socially constructed barriers.



## The COVID-19 Effect: Undiscovered agility, empathy, innovation, and connectedness.

It cannot be emphasised enough how the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the ways of working within the L&L community. At the same time, however, it was observed that there was an increase in connection among grantee partners and Voice despite the physical distance. There was also a push for innovation, particularly in the significant shift towards digital platforms, tools, and approaches. More importantly, it has led Voice to go for further consultation, empathy and mindfulness toward the rightsholder communities.

# CORE LESSONS LEARNED ON LINKING & LEARNING

Above are some core lessons and examples or different perspectives on L&L identified by the L&L community within Voice:



# THE LINKING & LEARNING IMPACT

Of the many things that L&L process considered from the start in seeking to hold spaces for people to connect and learn, building trust and rapport has been a key element.

L&L often involved sharing experiences and storytelling, which happened in an interactive way. These spaces proved effective for addressing common issues, sharing experiences, and building a sense of connection, understanding, and mutual support. The collaborative effort with diverse grantee partners and rightsholder groups presented some challenges due to varying emerging needs and diverse creative ideas. However, these challenges were overcome by creating a supportive and inclusive environment. This approach fostered deeper engagement, meaningful trust-building, and growth opportunities.

“It was vigorously promoted a respectful area, not judgmental, no bullying, and especially zero physical and mental abuse among the group. Before the session, we constantly reminded the ground rule and the group value; after the session, we reflected on the ground rule, and we were happy and kept it onward. We believe that it is not just a ground rule; it is our group value that we already have in our behaviour and characteristic. “

– Kuy Thida, Love is Diversity, Cambodia

“The linking and learning enabled all of us to learn, to unlearn, to relearn.

To be open to grow our capacity to cocreate evermore participatory and inclusive learning processes and linking and learning events. “

– Linking and Learning Meeting Participant, Jinja, Uganda



Kuy Thiida, Love is Diversity

Love is Diveristy and Women Peace Makers hosted a special screening program of a video sharing the real-life journeys of gay couples and the beauty of building loving families in Cambodia.

Love is Diveristy and Women Peace Makers hosted a special video screening program in celebration of Pride Month and IDAHOBIT 2024.



PwD CoP in Nigeria during their public event 2024



Voice Kenya Community of Practice engages in storytelling and advocacy for the elderly in Kilifi ahead of #WorldElderAbuseAwarenessDay2024

**Another key element that fuelled L&L was the emphasis on inclusion and intersectionality.**

Voice's CoPs became one of the platforms for the different communities to not only hear and try to understand each other, but to work together with an intersectional approach.

In Kenya, the Malindi District Association (MADCA) and Tribeless Youth joined forces to establish a CoP centred on the needs and welfare of older persons. Tribeless Youth is an organization that mobilises youth from diverse backgrounds, using storytelling and advocacy to inspire young people toward action. Meanwhile, Institute of Participatory Development-Kulamusana (IPD, formerly known as Malindi District Association (MADCA) is

a community-based organization, focused on empowering the Mijikenda community and surrounding coastal groups in Kenya through cultural preservation. As part of the Voice Kenya CoP on Older Persons, the two partners engaged in a series of dialogues and storytelling sessions in Kilifi County. In preparation for #WorldElderAbuseAwarenessDay2024, observed on June 15 by the United Nations, they produced a documentary titled Kuvunzika, which exposes the issue of elder abuse in Kilifi County. It was publicly screened on June 15.

**These CoPs and other spaces emphasise the value Voices puts into learning.**

More than the process itself, the programme also intended to dive deeper on the practicality of it and the effect or impact it had on the community. For some, the learning is already established, while for some there is a need to re-learn. Perhaps a particular concept, practice or tool has evolved, or the context has shifted. What was key is to hold a space where people can be open and comfortable about their own learning gaps, interests and needs, and to see the space as a resource, and as defined earlier, a space for mutual empowerment. Perhaps the more difficult process is the process of unlearning. People, for the most

part, are creatures of habit. Culture and tradition are set in stone and there is little room to tweak unspoken rules. However, for L&L, transformative learning was exhibited through the people's acknowledgment of the need to unlearn.

From reflections from LLFs, it can be surmised that genuine transformation occurs when rightsholders take ownership of their learning and advocacy. For learning to endure beyond the lifespan of the Voice, it is essential to empower grantee partners to become self-sufficient. By gradually shifting leadership roles to the communities themselves, the knowledge and skills gained through the programme would persist even after Voice's



Participants at the 2023 Annual Linking & Learning in Siem Reap, hosted by Voice Cambodia & Live & Learn Cambodia.

The Voice Philippines community gathers for Outcome Harvesting, CoP, and CoS events, driving change across Visayas and Mindanao



## 06 VOICE'S APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY

*Based on case studies and reflections offered by Sokchea Khim, Lilinsuto Wau, Sam Moral, Maureen Omwono, Sokchea Khim, Lilinsuto Wau, Sam Moral, and Maureen Omwono*

Voice did not adopt a formal strategy on fostering sustainability based on the programme's initial tender. However, based on its support on grant management and L&L, Voice fostered a culture of collaboration and learning among grantee partners. This support was adapted from the programme's initial years (2016-2021) to more recent years (2021-2024), resulting in a rightsholder-centred approach that responded better to the local contexts across the different countries.

This approach not only empowered grantee partners to implement their projects, but also increased their capabilities to respond to the long-term needs of rightsholders. Many grantee partners envisioned long-term impact with more clarity and took more ownership on generating impact for rightsholders even after the programme's direct support had ended. This change represented a significant step towards the sustainability of their efforts.

### ACTIONS ON SUSTAINABILITY AROUND GRANT MANAGEMENT

From its start, Voice has placed emphasis on listening to the needs of grantee partners and facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges. The following examples illustrate how this shift from a focus on capacity strengthening to a focus on empowerment benefited the sustainability of grantee partners' operations and project management.

#### Providing tailored support on project development and graduations to follow-up grants

Voice's grant making approach allowed organisations to secure their funding through tailored support. The programme awarded grants to organisations that required help to be able to fulfil requirements around proposal writing but demonstrated a commitment to learning and growth. The Voice team coached these organisations to fill in budget proposals and other documentation. In Niger, the



**A GOOD EXAMPLE OF HORIZONTAL GRADUATION IS YAPESDI IN INDONESIA, WORKING WITH YOUTH WITH DOWN SYNDROME, WHO OPTED FOR A REPEAT EMPOWERMENT GRANT AT THEIR OWN VOLITION. VERTICAL GRADUATION IS TAKING PLACE WITH AMPA, REPRESENTING PEOPLE WITH ALBINISM, IN MALI MOVING FROM AN EMPOWERMENT TO AN INNOVATE & LEARN GRANT.**

**- Voice Extension Proposal (2019)**

Association des Sourds du Niger (ASN) submitted a video application where their president explained their project in sign language, and Gollobès, an association supporting young girl leaders, opted for an audio application outlining their planned activities. These organisations then honed their skills in managing their funds, meeting set standards consistently. They implemented their projects successfully and were awarded a second round of funding. In the process, they gained the expertise to articulate their vision and impact not only to Voice but also other potential funders.

Introduced in the extension phase of the programme, the Empowerment Accelerator grants provided an avenue for further organisational growth to Empowerment grantee partners. Voice also nurtured offshoot projects emerging from the innovative ideas and partnerships formed within earlier projects or CoPs. Through the Innovate & Learn grants, the programme facilitated a space to experiment with new approaches, explore best practices, and refine their strategies.



## Focusing on capacity strengthening and empowerment

From the selection process to project closure, Voice supported grantee partners with flexibility on organisational and project management. Monitoring visits were not only utilised for tracking progress of project implementation, but also as opportunities for the Voice team to support the strengthening of the organisational and project management capacities of grantee partners. In Cambodia, the Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Organization (CIPO) had limited capacity on financial and fund management. Even though their finance officer joined the project inception workshop, they could not prepare their first financial report based on the guideline and template.

After one-on-one coaching with the finance officer, the financial report improved, and the team understood more about monitoring their budget. After going through this learning process, the team was able to apply this knowledge to other donors. Voice also supported grantee partners on improvements to internal control systems to better conform with Voice guidelines as well as local laws and regulations. Through Voice's support, the Lakon Komnit Organisation (LKO), an empowerment grantee partner based in Cambodia, reviewed and improved their internal policy on per diem rates, and an informal group from the Philippines, Initiatives and Movement for Gender Liberation Against Discrimination (IMGLAD), was able to secure separate registration of their organisation with Securities and Exchange Commission. As a result, these organisations made a small but essential step towards more sustainable operation and project implementation.

Voice's flexible approach also allowed grantee partners to go beyond traditional reporting, creatively capturing their achievements in story formats. This focus on storytelling ensured that the projects' achievements resonated more strongly with the diverse audiences of the grantee partners, potentially inspiring further action and lasting change. For example, grantee partners in Nigeria received support to document project achievements and package them in video clips, podcasts, and social media posts. A grantee partner from Nigeria even implemented conversation-based reporting with its rightsholders, allowing them to share their experiences and perspectives more directly.

## Looking beyond the project

The Voice country teams also supported training, coaching and mentoring on strategic planning, project development and fundraising. Sensitise Uganda credited the support from Voice with their growth from a small organisation into a more focused and strategic one, securing a grant from different embassies in Uganda for a new three-year project that

builds upon their prior work supported by Voice, leveraging good practices and lessons learned to strengthen youth inclusion in decision-making processes. Similarly, the Mbeleni Foundation from Uganda submitted three funding proposals, with one successfully qualifying for the next stage of the "Free Grow to Women Win" programme. Feminists in Kenya, an Innovate & Learn grantee partner from Kenya, registered their organisation and subsequently secured three additional funding opportunities. In the Philippines, five grantee partners collaborated on a proposal around women's rights and movement building and in Indonesia, two Voice grantee partners accessed a grant from VToice Climate Action, supported by the MFA and the "Urban Futures Program".

Eleven NGOs joined 120 participants in Cambodia to celebrate the 29th International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, fostering inclusive engagement and youth empowerment.



## ACTIONS ON SUSTAINABILITY AROUND LINKING & LEARNING

Voice has also placed more emphasis on empowering grantee partners to shape and facilitate L&L processes in a collaborative environment. The following examples illustrate how this shift from global-led L&L to a grantee partner-led approach contributed to sustainability of the actions.

Providing spaces for collaboration  
Voice provided spaces for grantee partners to collaborate both online and in-person. By utilising new connections and networks, many grantee partners amplified their impact, influenced policy and practice, and drove systemic

change. The Carmelite Prisoners Interest Organization (CAPIO) faced initial resistance from the Independent National Electoral Commission to include Nigerian inmates in the electoral process. Through L&L activities, they partnered with Yiaga Africa, an organisation with strong ties to the commission. They leveraged Yiaga Africa's expertise and influence to overcome the initial hurdles and successfully integrate inmates into the electoral process. In Niger, after implementing its project, GONI used its own funds to organise a L&L activity with the participation of

the rightsholders involved in the project. Several organisations and stakeholders were invited, and the activity became an opportunity for the participants to forge new alliances, gain a sense of belonging, and stay motivated and committed to their work, even in the face of challenges.

Through L&L, the programme created spaces for grantee partners to connect with one another and collaborate before engaging with other stakeholders. In Indonesia, Voice facilitated collaboration by dividing grantee partners into four CoPs through co-creation and mapping potential funding opportunities. These CoPs focused on advocacy for inclusion, sustainability

of movements, creative and inclusive campaigns, and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) in art and research. In the Philippines, Voice grantee partners organised "Conversations on Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion", where they critically examined existing programming, discussed future funding scenarios, and explored strategies for collective action. Similarly, in Laos, grantee partners took part in a proposal writing session during an L&L event, which resulted in a joint funding proposal. These examples demonstrate how L&L not only strengthened connections but also empowered grantee partners to amplify their impact, sustain their efforts, and co-create innovative solutions for the future.





## FOCUSING ON PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING

L&L served as a space for grantee partners to explore approaches, practices and tools that can drive sustainability. After realising a need for L&L processes being led locally during the mid-term reflection, Voice introduced L&L officers in each country to work more closely with the LLFs during the extension phase. This led to more creative and relevant approaches for grantee partners and, in turn, increased participation.

In Niger, this facilitated the co-creation of a project on the exclusion of individuals with disabilities from access to information. Through community of practice meetings, two organisations identified a shared commitment to integrating sign language into public information dissemination. The collaboration between the Réseau des Jeunes Nigériens pour le Changement Climatique (RJNCC), a network of young climate activists, and the Association des Sourds du Niger (ASN) resulted in a training and awareness-raising project on environmentally responsible practices in sign language. Providing capacity-building sessions on social media boosted the visibility of the organisations, leading to further partnerships, and even to a collaboration with an international organisation focused on accessibility issues in prisons. This underscores the transformative power of L&L, while demonstrating how the 3Cs approach can foster collaboration, amplify impact, and drive sustainable change.



Participants at the 2023 Annual Linking & Learning in Siem Reap, hosted by Voice Cambodia & Live & Learn Cambodia.

**“We see an increase in the participation of other stakeholders in grantee events and Communities of Practice. In general, a lot of learning on Communities of Practice as such, leading to changes in their set-up and in the active engagement of grantees in shaping these communities.”**

- Website blog post of the Voice L&L Coordinator (2020)



Presentation by the facilitator of all the challenges identified by the groups so that the audience can choose the 4 most important ones for the creation of the communities of practice.



## A RIGHTSHOLDER-CENTRED APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY

An important realisation of the Voice team has been that sustainability thrives on a rightsholder-centred approach. **Voice's commitment to this approach empowered grantee partners to take ownership by designing their projects, managing their funds, and defining their L&L priorities.**

As the examples have illustrated, introducing country-based processes for grant management and L&L encouraged more peer-to-peer collaboration and knowledge sharing while reducing traditional power structures.

Linking & Learning puzzle-piecing activity during the Voice Philippines kick-off meeting.



However, many grantee partners were not able to address key barriers to more sustainable operation and project management. Especially newer organisations struggled to find and navigate funding opportunities, leading to missed funding opportunities.

Other organisations that did submit proposals lacked the strategic expertise and guidance to align these proposals with their mission and a compelling case for support. Some organisations also solely focused on securing funds, neglecting internal capacity strengthening and staff development that is essential for their operation and project management.

**All these barriers to sustainability reduced the opportunities of many organisations to generate long-term impact for rightsholders.**

Folks from multi-country grantee organisations came together for their closure event



# WHAT WAS OUR IMPACT

This chapter begins with an overview of outcome and output data, offering a snapshot of the direct progress made across the programme measured against its results framework. It then, on a more long-term perspective, moves into a meta-analysis of Voice's impact, revealing how grantee partners have not only strengthened their capacities but also driven powerful, lasting change in their communities. Together, these insights celebrate the resilience, innovation, and transformative potential of those at the forefront of the fight for inclusion and equality.



# THE VOICE RESULTS FRAMEWORK: OUTCOME/OUTPUT INDICATORS DATA

This section provides a summary of the Outcome/Output Indicator (OI) data collected following Voice's Results Framework, which served as the programme's primary Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) structure, as agreed with the MFA. The Results Framework is built around five core result areas: Empower, Amplify, Influence, Communities of Practice (CoPs), Linking and Learning (L&L) infrastructure, and Innovation. The data, entered into the grant management system (SAP) by country teams, is based on reporting from grantee partners and represents the cumulative values as of

November 2024. These indicators have been consistently reported in Voice's Annual Reports.

It is important to note that some values presented here may differ from those in past Annual Reports. This divergence arises from differences in reporting practices, including delays in OI submissions for certain projects or retrospective corrections made by country teams. While Annual Reports often provided non-cumulative values, this summary offers a comprehensive, updated view of the programme's progress across its lifetime.

Overall, the OI demonstrate how the Voice programme was able to exceed performance targets, particularly from 2019 onwards:

Voice significantly exceeded its capacity strengthening targets (1.1, 1.2, 1.3) in most areas. **Particularly on its Empower and Amplify components, which surpassed planned numbers for rightsholder group engagement and collaborative actions.** The Influence component showed mixed results, exceeding targets in some areas but falling slightly short in others.

The programme also performed well on its Linking and Learning (L&L) targets (2.1,2.2,2.3). **It exceeded targets for CoP engagement and noticeably surpassed them for L&L infrastructure utilisation.** The Innovation component slightly exceeded its targets, showing steady growth over time.

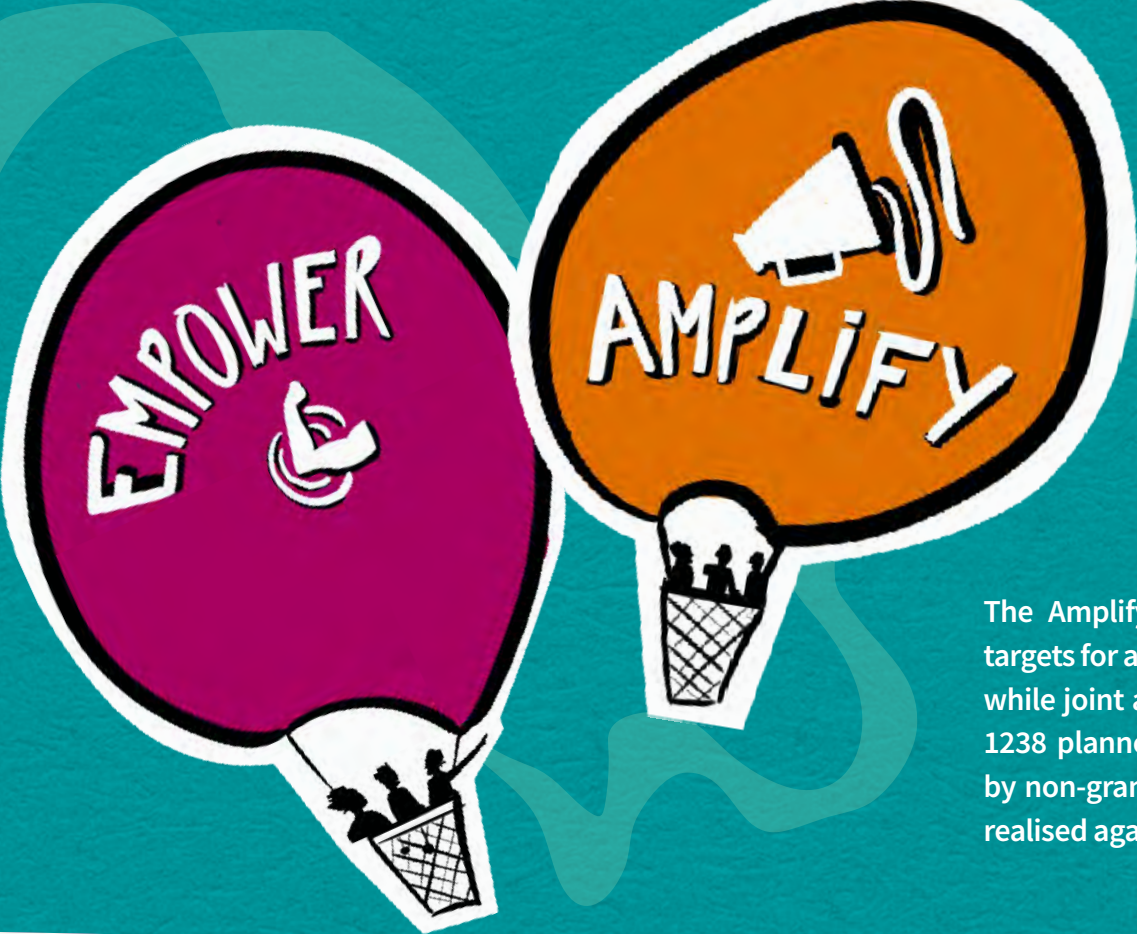
Global NOW-Us! Awards, 2022





# 4.1 EMPOWER

The Empower component significantly exceeded its targets for both the number of rightsholder groups presenting collective demands (4857 realised against 4398 planned) and those indicating access to safe spaces (5115 realised against 5419 planned). While initial years showed low realisation, substantial progress was made from 2019 onwards, indicating a successful scaling up of activities over time. The tables below provide a detailed breakdown of the achievements for each indicator within this component:



# 4.2 AMPLIFY

The Amplify component also demonstrated strong results, surpassing planned targets for alliances initiating joint action plans (1616 realised against 1289 planned), while joint actions implemented also exceeded expectations (1559 realised against 1238 planned), showcasing increased collaborative efforts. However, publications by non-grantees supporting grantee issues fell short of the planned number (3700 realised against 4958 planned).

NUMBER OF RIGHTSHOLDER GROUPS PRESENTING THEIR COLLECTIVE DEMANDS TO EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS	SUM OF PLANNED: 4398 rightsholder groups (467 projects reporting an average of 9)								
	SUM OF REALISED: 4857 rightsholder groups (454 projects reporting an average of 11)								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Sum of yearly planned	14	597	247	625	44	442	471	1402	646
Sum of yearly realised	0	2	93	507	942	135	199	1229	1750

NUMBER OF RIGHTSHOLDER GROUPS INDICATING TO HAVE SAFE SPACES TO CONVENE AND WORK	SUM OF PLANNED: 5419 rightsholder groups (465 projects reporting an average of 12)								
	SUM OF REALISED: 5115 rightsholder groups (460 projects reporting an average of 11)								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Sum of yearly planned	49	207	461	553	45	299	432	2083	1290
Sum of yearly realised	0	2	130	552	1182	152	218	1164	1715

NUMBER OF ALLIANCES, COALITIONS AND NETWORKS INDICATING TO INITIATE ACTIVITIES BASED ON JOINT ACTION PLANS	SUM OF PLANNED: 1289 alliances, coalitions and (281 projects reporting an average of 5)								
	SUM OF REALISED: 1616 alliances, coalitions and (271 projects reporting an average of 6)								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Sum of yearly planned	16	278	114	37	8	234	68	381	153
Sum of yearly realised	0	1	191	228	201	45	207	482	261

NUMBER OF JOINT ACTIONS ON INFLUENCING SOCIAL ACTORS IMPLEMENTED BY (INFORMAL) GROUPS, ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS	SUM OF PLANNED: 1238 joint actions implemented (286 projects reporting an average of 4)								
	SUM OF REALISED: 1559 JOINT ACTIONS (266 projects reporting an average of 6)								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Sum of yearly planned	11	145	165	72	45	299	432	2083	1290
Sum of yearly realised	0	2	130	552	1182	152	218	1164	1715



NUMBER OF JOINT ACTIONS ON INFLUENCING SOCIAL ACTORS IMPLEMENTED BY (INFORMAL) GROUPS, ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS	SUM OF PLANNED: 5419 rightsholder groups (465 projects reporting an average of 12)								
	SUM OF REALISED: 5115 rightsholder groups (460 projects reporting an average of 11)								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Sum of yearly planned	49	207	461	553	45	299	432	2083	1290
Sum of yearly realised	0	2	130	552	1182	152	218	1164	1715

NUMBER OF PLANS TO STRENGTHEN THEIR CAPACITY ON INFLUENCING DECISION MAKERS DEFINED BY (INFORMAL) GROUPS, ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS	SUM OF PLANNED: 951 plans to strengthen influencing (250 projects reporting an average of 4)								
	SUM OF REALISED: 902 plans to strengthen influencing (248 projects reporting an average of 4)								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Sum of yearly planned	21	86	79	553	45	299	432	2083	1290
Sum of yearly realised	0	2	130	552	1182	152	218	1164	1715



## 4.3 INFLUENCE

The Influence component showed mixed results. The number of groups reporting benefits from diverse influencing tools exceeded targets (1374 realised against 1298 planned). However, plans to strengthen influencing capacity were slightly below expectations (902 realised against 951 planned). Nevertheless, the numbers of peer-to-peer platforms and expert support provided, surpassed the planned number, showing a positive impact on knowledge sharing. The tables below provide a detailed breakdown of the achievements for each indicator within this component:

NUMBER OF (INFORMAL) GROUPS, ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS REPORTING BENEFITS ON USING A DIVERSE SET OF TOOLS AND INSTRUMENTS TO INFLUENCE OTHER SOCIAL ACTORS	SUM OF PLANNED: 1298 groups, organisations and networks (236 projects reporting an average of 6)								
	SUM OF REALISED: 1374 groups, organisations and networks (227 projects reporting an average of 6)								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Sum of yearly planned	50	189	193	81	61	257	64	250	153
Sum of yearly realised	0	1	78	89	366	137	77	378	248

# EXPERT SUPPORT ON INFLUENCING DECISION MAKERS PROVIDED BY GRANTEES TO RIGHTSHOLDER GROUPS	SUM OF PLANNED: 453 expert support on influencing (142 projects reporting an average of 3)								
	SUM OF REALISED: 691 expert support on influencing (183 projects reporting an average of 4)								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Sum of yearly planned	28	62	38	20	20	119	15	139	12
Sum of yearly realised	0	1	143	74	111	55	40	154	113



# 4.4 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

The Communities of Practice component largely achieved its goal, with 1420 rightsholder groups reporting the use of new insights acquired through L&L, exceeding the planned 1350. A significant increase in realised outcomes occurred from 2020 onward. The next table details the achieves related to the key indicator of this component:

NUMBER OF GRANTEES, RIGHTSHOLDER GROUPS AND OTHER KEY STAKEHOLDERS REPORTING USE OF NEW INSIGHTS AND INNOVATIVE APPROACHES THAT THEY HAVE ACQUIRED THROUGH LINKING AND LEARNING	SUM OF PLANNED: 1350 grantees, rightsholder groups and other key stakeholders (147 projects reporting an average of 9)								
	SUM OF REALISED: 1420 grantees, rightsholder groups and other key stakeholders (127 projects reporting an average of 11)								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Sum of yearly planned	46	314	196	51	0	176	33	324	210
Sum of yearly realised	0	0	48	118	391	60	179	224	400

# 4.5 LINKING AND LEARNING INFRASTRUCTURE

The L&L Infrastructure component dramatically surpassed its planned targets (1051 realised against 497 planned), indicating a high level of engagement and utilisation of the provided resources. This demonstrates a significant positive impact of the L&L infrastructure. The significant increase in realised values post-2019 is particularly notable.

NUMBER OF GRANTEES, RIGHTSHOLDER GROUPS AND OTHER KEY STAKEHOLDERS REPORTING BENEFITS FROM USING THE LINKING AND LEARNING INFRASTRUCTURE	SUM OF PLANNED: 497 grantees, rightsholder groups and other key stakeholders (13 projects by L&L facilitators reporting an average of 38)								
	SUM OF REALISED: 1051 grantees, rightsholder groups and other key stakeholders (16 projects by L&L facilitators reporting an average of 66)								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Sum of yearly planned	0	145	62	10	0	98	0	62	120
Sum of yearly realised	0	0	0	142	71	30	172	261	375



In January 2020, Accountability Lab (ALAB), the Linking and Learning facilitator for Niger and Mali, organized a workshop to establish Communities of Practice, empowering participants to identify and address challenges within their projects

# 2.3 INNOVATION

The Innovation component slightly exceeded its targets for the number of ideas and approaches developed, tested, and prototyped (310 realised against 266 planned). While the planned numbers remained relatively low each year, a steady increase in realised outcomes from 2019 onwards suggests increasing success in developing and implementing innovative solutions.

NUMBER OF IDEAS AND APPROACHES DEVELOPED, TESTED AND PROTOTYPED THROUGH INNOVATION LABS AND OTHER INNOVATIVE PROCESSES	SUM OF PLANNED: 266 ideas and approaches (100 projects reporting an average of 3)								
	SUM OF REALISED: 310 ideas and approaches (104 projects reporting an average of 3)								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Sum of yearly planned	11	14	47	7	4	43	26	88	26
Sum of yearly realised	0	0	14	18	71	15	49	70	73





# META-ANALYSIS

Understanding the cumulative impact of the numerous rightsholder-led efforts and projects is critical to assessing the contributions made by Voice to reducing inequality and fostering inclusion for marginalised rightsholder groups across Africa and Asia. Over eight years, Voice has worked to facilitate rightsholders seeking to address the systemic barriers they face in accessing the three impact areas.



# 01 PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Meta-Analysis was designed to provide a comprehensive evaluation of these efforts by shedding light on how rightsholder-led projects funded through Voice contributed to transformative change across the three impact areas. Beyond measuring outputs and outcomes, the study sought to uncover deeper insights into the lived experiences of grantee partners and rightsholders, exploring the extent to which their empowerment translated into tangible processes of change and societal impacts.

By synthesising data and findings from multiple sources — with a strong focus on change narratives by the grantee partners — the Meta-Analysis aimed to:

- Highlight the achievements of rightsholders in fostering inclusion and reducing inequality,
- Identify lessons learned and areas for improvement, and
- Inform future strategies for funding and programme design in similar contexts.

The study was guided by four key research questions designed to evaluate the impact of Voice-funded projects and their alignment with the programme's Theory of Change (ToC):

## 1 What changes happened because rightsholders were empowered?

This question explored how increased knowledge, skills, and self-confidence among rightsholders led to personal and collective transformations.

## 2 What changes happened because rightsholders took collective actions?

This question examined the role of solidarity and collective efforts in advancing inclusion, influencing policies, and addressing social norms.

## 3 What changes happened because rightsholders used their influencing capacity?

This question investigated how rightsholders engaged with decision-makers and institutions to advocate for systemic changes.

## 4 How have rightsholders contributed to the creation of inclusive and responsive societies?

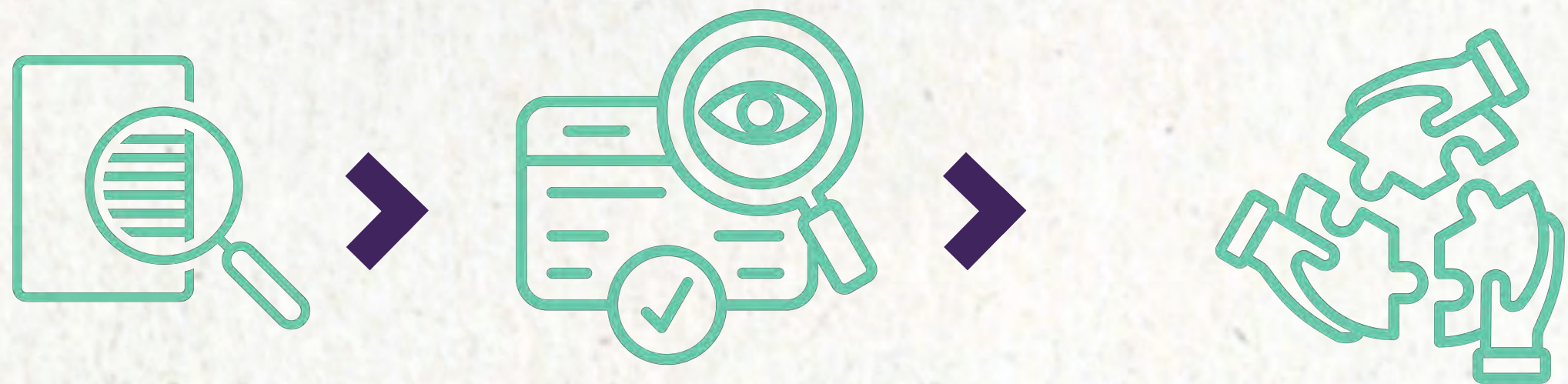
This question assessed the long-term societal impacts of rightsholder actions, focusing on inclusion and responsiveness at both community and institutional levels.

By addressing these questions, the Meta-Analysis reflects on Voice's legacy, particularly on the value of integrating empowerment, collective action, and advocacy into programmes that seek to address structural inequalities and promote social justice, and a resource for informing future interventions aimed at achieving inclusive and equitable development.



# 02 METHODOLOGY

To ensure the analysis captured the complexity of change and the diversity of experiences across the Voice focus countries, the Meta-Analysis combined quantitative with qualitative data. It then examines Voice by synthesising different the quantitative findings with a set of qualitative narratives collected throughout the programme’s lifespan, offering a nuanced understanding of the programme’s impact.



## CONTEXT ANALYSIS DATA:

Between 2016 and 2022, four Context Analyses were conducted to evaluate the environments in which Voice country teams and grantee partners operated. These analyses explored social, economic, and political contexts, identifying challenges and opportunities for the programme and its projects. They provided essential baseline data and contextual insights that informed programming and strategic direction.

## OUTCOME HARVESTING DATA:

Outcome Harvesting (OH) was used as the primary monitoring and evaluation methodology employed by Voice and its grantee partners, as retrospective evaluation method to gather evidence of both intended and unintended outcomes resulting from grantee partner efforts. This methodology aimed to uncover relevant changes within the operational context and the degree to which projects influenced these changes. Through write-shops and individual reporting, grantee partners from the programme’s original timeline as well as its extension phase submitted 469 documented OH statements, of which 358 were approved to be included in the Meta-Analysis, forming a substantial evidence base for assessing the grantee partners’ achievements.

## PROJECT JOURNEY AND IMPACT STORY DATA:

### Project Journeys:

Grantee partners of the programme’s extension phase were encouraged to document the evolution of their projects, highlighting their results achieved, challenges encountered, and lessons learned. Around half of the projects submitted these narratives, offering comprehensive insights into the trajectories in all countries except Tanzania. Multi-country projects were instead mostly covered through audiovisual media submissions, that were not included as part of the analysis due to technical limitations.

### Impact Stories:

For projects implemented during the programme’s original timeline, the Voice team developed structured Impact Stories for about half of the projects, covering most countries, except Niger due to staff limitations at the time. These narratives, complemented by Stories of Change (SoC) submitted by nearly all projects, captured qualitative data about personal experiences and community-level impacts



## SAMPLE SIZE

Based on a combined number of 753 narratives, including 358 OH statements as well as 395 Project Journeys and Impact Stories, **the key data used by the Meta-Analysis covers around half of the 745 projects that were implemented under the programme.** If comparing the number of projects implemented with the number of narratives, Indonesia and the Philippines are overrepresented by a factor of around 0.5, while Tanzania and multi-country narratives are underrepresented by a factor of around 0.5.

**Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities (20%)** were most highlighted in **narratives from the Philippines, Kenya and Indonesia.**



Finally, **LGBTQI people (8%)** were most often mentioned in multi-country narratives and those from the Philippines, while there were no narratives at all from West Africa.



Among the five rightsholder groups, **vulnerable youth and the elderly (26%)** were most frequently mentioned, particularly in narratives from Niger, Tanzania and Cambodia.



**People with disabilities (25%)** featured prominently in **Mali, Laos, and Nigeria,** and within multi-country narratives.



**Women facing exploitation, abuse, or violence (21%)** were most represented in **narratives from Uganda and Mali.**



Among the three impact areas, **“Space for political participation and citizen engagement” (343 narratives, 44%)** was most prevalent in **multi-country narratives as well as Niger, the Philippines and Tanzania.** As for **“Improved access to social services, in particular health and education” (213 narratives, 29%),** narratives from **Cambodia, Nigeria and Mali** had the highest proportions, while the **Philippines and multi-country narratives** had the lowest. As for **“Improved access to productive resources (finance, land and water) and employment” (197 narratives, 27%),** **Kenya, Uganda, the Philippines and Laos** had the highest proportions, while **Cambodia, Niger, and multi-country narratives** had the lowest.

Additionally, the 358 OH statements were categorised based on types of change and social actors. Overall, changes related to the agenda setting of communities and other groups were the dominant type of change, while institutional changes were prevalent in both behaviour and policy areas, and changes in relationships were observed with an even distribution across social actors.

## TRIANGULATION TO OTHER VOICE REPORTS

All findings of this examination were then triangulated with previous findings made throughout the program’s lifespan, encompassing two additional types of data sources:

### Annual Report data:

Voice submitted eight annual reports between 2017 and 2024 that year provided comprehensive overviews of the past year of implementation, while offering insights into its performance and helping to maintain transparency with all stakeholders.

### Evaluation data:

Voice commissioned three evaluations to external parties in 2017, 2019 and 2023 that served baseline, mid-term, and final evaluations, respectively. These evaluations helped to assess the programme’s relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, providing an evidence-based analysis for improvement and future planning.



## 03 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The Meta-Analysis was guided by the programme's the three impact areas. Data from the curated sources was analysed to answer the guiding questions, with a focus on synthesising findings across qualitative and quantitative dimensions. **By combining traditional evaluation methods with Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in the form of Large Language Models (LLMs), the study provides a robust and nuanced understanding of the programme's contributions.**

The analytical process was iterative, with insights from each step informing refinements in others. **Key steps included:**



### DATA PRE-PROCESSING

The project documents were first pre-processed, involving steps such as cleaning and structuring them into formats aligned with the requirements of the model.



### AI TOOLS FINE-TUNING

The LLM was then fine-tuned to adapt its contextual understanding to the specific language, themes, and nuances of the programme's data, ensuring precise extraction of answers to the guiding questions.



### DATA TRIANGULATION

Findings from primary and secondary sources were cross verified to ensure robustness. The LLM supported the triangulation process, by synthesising information across data sources, enriching the analysis with detailed and robust findings.

### TOPIC MODELLING AND SUMMARISATION

The LLM tool was then used for topic modelling and summarisation of the outputs of the analysis.



### QUALITATIVE WRITEUPS

AI-driven outputs were matched back to the original data through qualitative narratives, enabling the identification of case studies and specific impacts to illustrate key themes around the impact of Voice across the three impact areas.



**Each analytical step was refined iteratively to improve the performance of the model as well as enhance the quality and relevance of the findings and qualitative writeups.**



## 04 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Several limitations around the selected data sources and analytical framework must be acknowledged to provide a balanced evaluation:

### DATA QUALITY AND COMPLETENESS

Certain gaps in the dataset presented challenges. For instance, missing narratives from Tanzania and multi-country grantee partners as well as the overrepresentation of Indonesia and the Philippines reduced the completeness of insights, potentially limiting the representativeness of findings. Similarly, some narratives were written in languages other than English, which required translation, which may have led to subtle shifts in meaning that impacted the analysis.

### BALANCING AUTOMATION AND HUMAN INSIGHT

While LLMs excel at streamlining data processing and uncovering patterns for large volumes of text, they cannot independently grasp the contextual nuances or verify the accuracy of translated data. They are most effective when used to complement traditional qualitative methods. Human analysis was critical to interpreting contextual and linguistic nuances, triangulating insights, and addressing gaps in the dataset. This balanced approach ensured that contextual depth and stakeholder perspectives were not overshadowed by automated outputs, ensuring a comprehensive and accurate evaluation.

Overall, the Meta-Analysis underscores the importance of addressing dataset limitations and combining AI-driven insights with human-centred analysis, recognizing the role of contextual and linguistic nuances in ensuring robust and meaningful analysis methods.

## 05 FINDINGS

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive analysis of the Voice programme's impacts, structured around its three impact areas that serve as the primary lens through which its contributions are examined.

Each subsection delves deeper into one of these thematic impact areas based on the following structure:

### CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

By mapping challenges and pre-existing conditions across the ten country contexts, each subsection provides essential background to understand the challenges and opportunities encountered by grantee partners and rightsholders over the programme's lifespan.

### KEY THEMES

Subsequently, each subsection summarises the key themes emerging from the analysis of the narratives.

### FOUR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Each subsection examines the changes resulting from empowered rightsholders, collective action by rightsholders, the exercise of rightsholders' influencing capacity, and, finally, the rightsholders' overall contributions to creating more inclusive and responsive societies. This includes both general observations and specific case studies that illustrate the impact of rightsholders actions in various locations. The case studies illustrate how rightsholders and grantee partners navigated complex socio-economic and legal environments to achieve transformative outcomes, offering deeper insight into the lived experiences and systemic impacts of the programme offering a detailed exploration of empowered rightsholders driving systemic change in the ten focus countries.

### VOICE CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPACT

Voice contributions and impact: Finally, each subsection summarises the contributions and impact based on general observations and specific case studies.



## 06 FINDINGS

### IMPROVED ACCESS TO (PRODUCTIVE) RESOURCES (FINANCE, LAND AND WATER) AND EMPLOYMENT

This subsection explores the outcomes and impact of Voice's funded projects to improve the access to resources and employment for rightsholder groups across its ten focus countries in Africa and Asia.



### CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Despite overall economic growth in all countries since 2016, benefits have been unevenly distributed, often excluding rural, indigenous, and low-income populations. Each country faces unique challenges:



**Land grabs and displacement affecting indigenous people** (Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Uganda)



**Weak labour protections and rising urban poverty** (Indonesia, Kenya)



**Security issues limiting economic access** (Mali)



**Climate change and poverty hindering agricultural access** (Niger)



**Urban-centric growth exacerbating rural inequalities** (Philippines, Tanzania)



**Reliance on oil and slow diversification impacting rural areas** (Nigeria)



**Persistent land rights issues and limited access to finance** (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda)

Overall, the contextual analyses conducted by Voice highlight the need for improved resource distribution and employment opportunities to reach underserved rightsholder populations across all countries.



## KEY THEMES

Projects led by rightsholder groups have contributed significantly improved access to resources and employment opportunities, which enhanced their economic empowerment, independence, and resilience. By supporting diverse projects, Voice has facilitated the development of community-owned enterprises, expanded the inclusion of rightsholder groups in formal economies, and expanded access to comprehensive vocational and financial literacy trainings and initiatives. These initiatives have strengthened economic security, enabled advocacy for equitable policies, and fostered more inclusive societies. Key themes include:

### Empowering women and gender equity:

Projects have successfully challenged traditional gender roles, empowering women to take active roles in family planning, household decision-making, and economic productivity. The Gender Action Learning System (GALS) tool, widely employed by Voice grantee partners, for example, enabled women to visualise and implement family goals, fostering collaboration and reducing conflict within households in different contexts. There is evidence that rightsholder's initiatives contributed to increase men's participation in traditionally female-dominated household tasks further illustrates a positive cultural shift.



Teenage Mothers engaged in agricultural practices, tailoring, and hair dressing for income generating (by Teenage Mother and Child Support Foundation, Uganda)

### Collective action for social change:

Voice projects have fostered collective action through community platforms and partnerships with unions and government bodies, creating avenues for rightsholder groups to advocate for their rights, namely young domestic workers demanding better working conditions and rural or indigenous more access to decision-making governance processes in large infrastructure or conservation projects (e.g., building oil pipelines in West Africa, hydroelectric dams or forest management across Southeast Asia). This collective effort has led to improved community cohesion and heightened intra-group social awareness and solidarity.



Participants of the 4th International Indigenous Youth Conference



Outcome Harvesting and Project Journey Workshop in Laos

### Increased influencing capacity:

Rightsholders have developed greater capacity to influence (local) policies and social norms through leadership and advocacy training. This newfound confidence has enabled them to articulate their needs, participate in community governance, and drive change at both the household and community levels.



Come Initiative

### Inclusive resource management and economic participation

Supported projects have promoted the creation of inclusive social enterprises and small businesses that have expanded rightsholders' participation in formal economies. Vocational training and job creation initiatives have provided rightsholder groups, particularly young women and persons with disabilities, with critical skills and opportunities, contributing to improved livelihoods and financial independence.

### Enhanced infrastructure and resource access

Voice-funded projects contributed to infrastructure improvements that increased access to essential resources such as water and electricity, improving overall living conditions and economic prospects for rural and indigenous communities.



Emerging Leaders Foundation



## WHAT CHANGES HAPPENED BECAUSE RIGHTSHOLDERS WERE EMPOWERED?

Empowerment of rightsholders led to significant shifts in self-confidence, agency, and community engagement. In Laos, grantee partners like HomeNet Lao (HNL) working with disadvantaged women workers gained access to training on financial and business management, gender analysis, and leadership through collaborations with governmental entities like different workers unions and Lao Justice Office. This empowerment allowed women to actively participate in community planning and advocate for equal recognition of their labour, resulting in improved family dynamics and reduced household conflicts. Additionally, indigenous groups working with Bantay Kita and the Mindanao Peoples Peace Movement (MPPM) in the Philippines engaged in advocacy efforts for land and resource rights, leading to stronger voices in dialogues with government entities and improved awareness of their legal rights.



Folks from multi-country grantee organisations came together for their closure event



What is shifting FEMAPH Mali March

The project improved the financial status of 29 association members, many of whom once relied on begging to survive. Members now engage in income-generating activities, such as selling charcoal and small-scale livestock farming, and participate in local markets without discrimination.

## CASE STUDY

### Leprosy survivors increasing their self-reliance and economic inclusion in Mali



During the kick-off meeting with new grantee partners in Mali

Since May 2021, the Leprosy Survivors Association in Ségou has been recognised and involved in urban commune activities, signalling a major shift from isolation and exclusion to active participation in local development. Through Voice-supported advocacy and awareness initiatives—including conferences, campaigns, and community networking—leprosy survivors transitioned from dependence and social invisibility to agents of change.

This transformation fostered broader societal acceptance, breaking historic cycles of exclusion and economic marginalisation. Local authorities now collaborate with the association, integrating members into community development plans. The increased income and economic participation of leprosy survivors not only improved their livelihoods but also demonstrated their potential to contribute meaningfully to their communities' welfare.



Linking and Learning Event in Mali







Migori County Youth Forum

## WHAT CHANGES HAPPENED BECAUSE RIGHTSHOLDERS TOOK COLLECTIVE ACTIONS?

Collective action resulted in stronger advocacy networks and increased community influence on decision-making processes. For example, community-led initiatives in Niger, such as those championed by the Réseau de la Jeunesse Nigérienne sur les Changements Climatiques (RJNCC), aimed at addressing climate challenges and agricultural access brought together rural populations to influence local agricultural policies. This collaborative effort led to enhanced community resilience and targeted rural economic initiatives. Similarly, in Mali, through the project of Soro Association, youth coalitions united to address unemployment and security issues, creating platforms for advocacy and dialogues with government bodies to address the economic needs of rural youth.



In Niger: A skit presentation about the living conditions of girls and women in schools and the workplace

Ideal Research Center



## CASE STUDY

### Youth expanding their political engagement in Kenya

In 2023, the Migori County Youth Forum (MCYF) launched the “project to empower rightsholder groups—youth, PWD, and women—to engage in local governance. The initiative trained 40 youth champions who mobilised their communities and increase citizen participation in local budget planning and oversight, with the formation of the Budget Advocates Network further promoting transparency and accountability. By providing access to key budget documents, participants gained the tools to monitor public resources and hold leaders accountable.

As a result, the Migori County government devolved public meetings to the ward level, fostering greater inclusivity. Citizen advocacy also resulted in the dismissal of three officials for fund misappropriation, demonstrating the power of community action. Overall, the initiative empowered young people to demand public accountability, strengthening civic engagement, and drive meaningful change in their communities.



Adrian Kibe and Milka Wahu of Amka Afrika Justice Initiative during the Migori County Youth Forum



Nancy Nyaleso and Kennedy Ashuma of Empower Her Initiative during the Migori County Youth Forum





The Dew Drop Foundation presentation of the updated inclusive constitution to the Chairman of the Constitution Committee and the Igwe of Umuode

## WHAT CHANGES HAPPENED BECAUSE RIGHTSHOLDERS USED THEIR INFLUENCING CAPACITY?

Increased influencing capacity among rightsholders drove policy changes and improved accountability mechanisms. In Nigeria, through the work of organisations such as the Dewdrop Foundation, advocacy campaigns by rural communities of rightsholders highlighted the negative impact of economic dependency on oil, pushing for diversification policies and greater rural inclusion in economic planning. Rightsholders leveraged their capacity to influence policy through sustained advocacy, which led to more attention on rural development initiatives. In Cambodia, Kui indigenous leaders, supported by the Organization for the Promotion of Kui Culture (OPKC), engaged in lobbying and dialogues with government officials, resulting in heightened awareness and some policy adjustments to address land concessions and resource access rights for rural and Indigenous peoples.

### CASE STUDY

#### Indigenous people enhancing inclusive natural resource management in the Philippines

The Save Sierra Madre Network Alliance, Inc. (SSMNAI) worked with the Dumagat Peoples in the Philippines to advocate for ancestral rights and engage in natural resource management. Prior to the project, many Indigenous leaders felt disheartened, but hope and trust was renewed thanks to the collaboration with SSMNAI, which enabled meaningful dialogue with government agencies.

Through active participation in Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) summits, the Dumagat secured a Memorandum of Commitment with key agencies to protect forests and uphold their ancestral rights. This collaboration strengthened their advocacy for sustainable livelihoods, forest protection, and resource rights. Key outcomes included joint monitoring of illegal logging, stricter law enforcement, and the establishment of new Marine Protected Areas in their territories in their territories, reflecting increased government responsiveness and strengthened community-government collaboration.



Dumagat women of Tanay, Rizal fighting for #EachforEqual

### CASE STUDY

#### Domestic workers gaining better working conditions in Tanzania

Over the course of their project, Wote Sawa trained hundreds of domestic workers across four wards in Mwansa, Tanzania. The training focused on human rights, labour laws, leadership, and negotiation skills, with a particular emphasis on the rights and protections available to Child and Young Domestic Workers (CYDWs). Participants learned about their legal entitlements, such as employment contracts, leave, and fair remuneration, while also gaining leadership and negotiation skills to advocate for themselves. The impact of the training was tangible: 39 CYDWs began discussing their rights with employers, resulting in 35 receiving employment contracts—a crucial step toward ensuring decent working conditions. 20 CYDWs also saw their wages raised to the government-mandated minimum.

But Wote Sawa's efforts extended just beyond training; they hosted an awareness and advocacy meetings with local leaders and government officials, leading to new procedures for registering domestic workers in local councils. By researching and disseminating legal information, producing educational materials, and advocating for policy changes, Wote Sawa aimed to align at local level domestic workers' rights with international standards.



Training of Wote, Sawa





## HOW HAVE RIGHTSHOLDERS CONTRIBUTED TO THE CREATION OF INCLUSIVE AND RESPONSIVE SOCIETIES?

Rightsholders' contributions fostered inclusive and responsive societal norms and systems. In Tanzania, organisations such as Oltoito Le Maa and Okoa New Generation, working with vulnerable women and youth engaged in agricultural and financial resource access initiatives, leading to gradual improvements in resource distribution practices and more representation of rightsholder groups in local economic planning. In Uganda, Benet Lobby Group and Children's Chance International worked with rightsholders who then advocated for stronger land rights protections and more inclusive agricultural productivity programs, creating greater government accountability and improved support structures for rural populations. These efforts demonstrated that rightsholders' participation and advocacy can transform societal structures, making them more inclusive and better attuned to the needs of diverse communities.

## CASE STUDY

### A regional consortium advancing financial inclusion of LGBTQI people in Asia

Since 2019 and with the support from Voice through a multi-country grant, the Asia Pacific Coalition on Male Sexual Health (APCOM) and its partners across Southeast Asia have strategically engaged with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to promote inclusive financial policies that integrate the needs of rightsholder groups, mainly LGBTQI communities in Laos, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Thailand. This project began with internal discussions and progressed to substantial collaborations, including meetings with ADB's Social Development Specialists, Gender Equity Thematic Group Heads, and various of their country/regional offices. These engagements aimed to mainstream sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) awareness within ADB's policies, processes, loan arrangements, and operations.

APCOM's continued advocacy resulted in LGBTQI issues being integrated into consultations for the ADB's Safeguard Policy review, representing a significant step to mainstream SOGIESC within their integrity and compliance frameworks. APCOM's efforts extended to regional-level activities where they engaged with stakeholders to refine targeted strategies for inclusive financial practices. Through targeted workshops, APCOM also catalysed partnerships with private businesses to promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) policies and good practices.



Partners from Tanzania engaging in interactive diversity mindful inclusion and communication practices



LGBTQI Stories produced by Alyansa ng Kabataang Mindanao para sa Kapayapaan (AKMK)



Socheata and the audience during her powerful sharing of her story of change during the closing of Voice Cambodia



# OVERALL CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPACT

**The impact of Voice on access to resources and employment opportunities for rightsholder groups has been profound, fostering both systemic change and individual empowerment.**

Through its support for diverse initiatives across different regions, rightsholder-led projects supported via Voice have consistently worked to bridge the gap between communities of rightsholders and the opportunities they need to thrive economically and socially. The outcomes go beyond simply providing resources or job opportunities; they encompass empowerment, inclusion, and systemic transformation.

**Voice-funded projects have enabled rightsholder groups—such as women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, and the LGBTQI community—to gain greater access to productive resources like land, finance, and sustainable livelihoods.**

This access has been facilitated through capacity-building, advocacy, and policy influence that break down historical and cultural barriers. In addition to resource access, Voice has improved employment opportunities by supporting vocational training, capacity-building, and entrepreneurial ventures tailored to the needs of rightsholder groups. The focus on fostering inclusive environments has challenged discriminatory norms and enabled rightsholders to enter formal economies and decision-making spaces, addressing socioeconomic disparities at their root.

**By amplifying rightsholders' voices and building alliances, Voice has contributed to creating more inclusive economies where all individuals can participate and thrive.** Ultimately, Voice's impact lies not only in increasing access to productive resources but also in transforming the systems and norms that have historically excluded these groups.





# IMPROVED ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES, IN PARTICULAR HEALTH AND EDUCATION

This subsection explores the outcomes and impact of Voice’s funded projects to improve rightsholder groups’ access to social services, particularly health and education.



## CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Structural gaps disproportionately affect rightsholders’ access to services across the ten focus countries in Africa and Asia. While policy changes were made in several countries, consistent issues of underfunding, particularly in rural areas, limited delivery of services, especially for rightsholder groups. Geographic isolation, economic constraints, conflict, and language barriers as well as the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these problems. Specific challenges in the different countries include:



**Persistent funding shortfalls** (Cambodia, Laos, Mali, Nigeria, Uganda)



**Uneven access social services due to geographic location and economic factors** (Indonesia, Kenya, Philippines, Tanzania, Uganda)



**Low-quality services** (Tanzania, Philippines);



**Conflict and high inflation** (Mali, Nigeria)



**High dropout rates in public schools and unequal access to schooling** (Indonesia, Tanzania, Uganda).

Overall, the contextual analyses conducted by Voice highlight the need for addressing funding gaps, improving service delivery, and mitigating the impact of conflict and economic hardship as crucial for rightsholders’ equitable access of to health and education across all countries.



## KEY THEMES

The project narratives demonstrate a multi-faceted approach to improving access to social services by focusing on empowerment, rights advocacy, targeted interventions to address specific vulnerabilities, fostering community participation, and building capacity for long-term sustainability. PWD, women, and vulnerable youth and elderly were represented more regularly, but there were also impactful narratives concerning LGBTQI people as well as indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities. Key themes include:

### Emphasis on empowerment and rights-based approaches:

A central focus is empowering rightsholder groups based on the disseminating information about their rights, building confidence and skills, and creating platforms for their voices to be heard and their concerns addressed.



### Addressing specific vulnerabilities around access to social services

Projects tackle critical issues such as HIV/AIDS transmission, child marriage, drug use, violence against women, and promoting positive parenting. They combine awareness campaigns, service provision of services such as on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), and policy advocacy to achieve tangible impact.

### Community engagement and collaboration

Successful projects rely on community engagement and collaboration. This includes working with community leaders and organisations to ensure projects are locally relevant. Collaboration between these stakeholders and government officials, policymakers, service providers, and other stakeholders is essential for achieving lasting change.

### Capacity strengthening for ownership and sustainable change

Strengthening the capacities of individuals and organisations is emphasised to ensure long-term impact. This involves training programs for rightsholders and their communities, fostering a sense of ownership and sustainability within the communities themselves.



### Promotion of inclusive education and social inclusion

Creating inclusive education materials and environments is a recurring theme, aiming to break down barriers. This is coupled with broader efforts to foster social inclusion by advocating for policy changes and influencing social norms.







Participants during the 2019 learning activity in Cambodia

## WHAT CHANGES HAPPENED BECAUSE RIGHTSHOLDERS WERE EMPOWERED?

Empowering rightsholders has proven to be a transformative force, enabling individuals and communities to actively participate in securing their rights and accessing essential services. Efforts to empower individuals and groups, particularly youth, women, ethnic minorities, and PWD.



Ms. Ashisah of Oxfam presents on Advocacy and Influencing Campaigns



Participants during the 2019 learning activity in Cambodia

Projects supported by Voice have successfully empowered individuals by equipping them with knowledge about their rights, legal frameworks, and available services. Examples include training sessions on women's rights, older people's rights, and disability rights conducted by **Federation of Association Supporting Older People AEK PHNOM (FASOA)** in Cambodia and how projects championed by the **International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI)** and its consortium partners to make stateless ethnic minorities aware about their basic rights in East Africa motivated them to formally request citizenship, which highly contributed to their official legal recognition and granting them access to basic social services. Overall, newfound knowledge instilled confidence in individuals to advocate for themselves and their communities.

Finally, many projects have provided direct support to individuals facing specific challenges. **Child Helpline Cambodia (CHC)** offered counselling services to households at risk of child marriage, demonstrating the importance of individualised intervention. The Si Thai program by **Men's Health Social Services (MHSS)** in Cambodia directly assisted vulnerable men who have sex with men with food distribution, education, and blood testing, demonstrating a commitment to addressing immediate needs.

## CASE STUDY



Excerpt from a video published by Ministry of Women's Affairs in Cambodia about ending child marriage

### Indigenous adolescents speaking out against child marriage in Cambodia

The project implemented in Ratanakiri Province, Cambodia, by CHC has significantly improved access to social services for indigenous adolescents, especially girls, affected by early/child marriage and SGBV. The project empowered local leaders, parents, and adolescents themselves to advocate for their rights and access vital services. Training religious leaders, tribal elders, and community members on the consequences of child marriage and teenage pregnancy fostered awareness. This was combined with awareness-raising on positive parenting concepts reached both adolescents and their families. The project also helped to establish Child Clubs and Indigenous Adolescent and Girls-Led Groups, empowering young people to speak out against child marriage and SGBV. These groups have become platforms for peer-to-peer education, advocacy, and the dissemination of information about their rights.

Building on these results, the project focused on individualised intervention counselling services offered directly to households at risk or affected by child marriage. By building the capacity of local government officials and health focal points, the project ensured that essential services were accessible and culturally sensitive, paving the way for a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to tackling child marriage and SGBV in the province.





A previous photo exhibition workshop in Cambodia

## WHAT CHANGES HAPPENED BECAUSE RIGHTSHOLDERS TOOK COLLECTIVE ACTIONS?

**Collective action by rightsholders has created a powerful force for change, leading to a more inclusive and equitable access to social services. Many projects have successfully mobilised communities to address shared challenges.**

The CCD empowered PWD in Nigeria to advocate for their rights and participate in political processes. This collective action led to significant changes in legal structures and political participation, creating a more conducive environment for PWD.

The Si Thai program by MHSS in Cambodia successfully integrated LGBTQI voices into planning meetings, council meetings, and community projects. This increased representation has resulted in a better understanding of the specific needs of the LGBTQI community, and the allocation of resources tailored to their needs. Rightsholders have also actively advocated for policy changes that promote inclusivity and equal access to services.

In Laos, advocacy towards an ethnic decree by the Social Development Alliance Association (SODA), aimed at improving access to social services for ethnic minorities, demonstrates this commitment to policy reform. Similarly, LGBTQI community leaders in Laos, empowered by the Policy Advocacy Manual and IEC materials of the Community Health and Inclusion Association (CHIAS), have engaged with government agencies and local authorities, advocating for policy changes that benefit their community.



Mrs. Chhoeun, holding a rainbow flag at one of the previous LGBTI exhibition events

## CASE STUDY

### Deaf people amplifying their voices in Niger



The “Avec nos mains, faisons nous entendre” (*With Our Hands, Let Us Be Heard*) project, an initiative undertaken by the Association des Sourds du Niger (ASN), addressed the social marginalisation and lack of access to services faced by deaf and hard of hearing people in Niger.

The project focused on amplifying rightsholders’ voices through targeted interventions. Training public officials in sign language fostered greater understanding on the necessity to improve communication with the deaf community and accessibility within public services, while awareness campaigns successfully raised the profile of deaf people’s challenges and the need for systemic change. Improved teacher training increased the quality of deaf children’s education and their academic performance. Crucially, the project also facilitated the issuance of 270 birth certificates through mobile registration services, removing a major administrative hurdle to accessing fundamental rights and essential services by the community. The ongoing advocacy work inspired by this project offers a beacon of hope for a more equitable and inclusive future for deaf people in Niger, even as the project’s goal — the recognition of sign language as a national language in Niger — remains a crucial step towards achieving full inclusion and equality for the deaf community.





## WHAT CHANGES HAPPENED BECAUSE RIGHTSHOLDERS USED THEIR INFLUENCING CAPACITY?

**Rightsholders, when empowered with knowledge and resources, can exert a strong influence on societal perceptions as well as institutions and decision-makers, leading to significant changes.** By sharing compelling narratives and using innovative communication strategies, projects have influenced public perception and reduced stigma.

The “Connecting Our Voices to the World” project by TQM utilised life story videos to raise awareness about the needs and challenges of PWD in Nigeria, changing community perceptions and fostering understanding. Rightsholders have also effectively held institutions accountable for fulfilling their obligations to rightsholder groups. The FASOA’s project in Cambodia influenced local health centres to provide tailored services to older people, highlighting the importance of cross-sector collaboration. The “Empowering Change” project by CCD in Nigeria leveraged the Disability Desk Officer within the judiciary to ensure that PWD had access to justice and protection against discrimination.

Overall, success of rightsholders’ influencing efforts depended on the collaboration of diverse stakeholders, with many projects have effectively building partnerships and collaborations with government agencies, civil society organisations, and local communities.

## CASE STUDY

### People with disabilities enhancing their access to essential social services in Nigeria

**The “Empowering Change” project by CCD significantly impacted the lives of PWD in Lagos State, Nigeria, by enhancing their access to social services.** Through focused advocacy, capacity building, and public awareness initiatives, the project facilitated improvements in legal and political spheres, leading to greater inclusivity for PWD.

Firstly, the project strengthened legal support structures for PWD. The establishment of toll-free lines for reporting rights violations and the creation of a Disability Desk Officer position within the Lagos State Judiciary provided PWD with readily accessible mechanisms for seeking justice and protection against discrimination. Secondly, the project fostered a more inclusive political landscape for PWD. By engaging electoral officers and aspiring politicians in training sessions, the project equipped them with the knowledge to champion disability inclusion. This resulted in these officials implementing more inclusive communication and data collection strategies and the decentralisation of the Disability Desk. These impactful changes created a more conducive environment for PWD to actively participate in political and justice systems, ensuring their voices were heard and their needs will be adequately addressed in government planning and practice.



CASE STUDY

Survivors of sexual violence improving their access to justice and support in Indonesia

The project, led by the Legal Resources Center for Gender and Human Rights (LRC-KJHAM) based on a consortium of four institutions working in diverse regions of Indonesia with varying legal and cultural contexts, responded to the challenge posed by the high incidence of sexual violence and the obstacles to implementing the law on the Crime of Sexual Violence (TPKS). Key challenges included law enforcement officials’ reluctance to utilise the TPKS law, a lack of understanding of its provisions, and instances of corruption interfering with victim support.

The project documented cases illustrating these difficulties to highlight the urgent need for the development and implementation of supporting regulations. The project then focused on advocating for the establishment of Regional Technical Implementation Units for the Protection of Women and Children (UPTD PPA) and promoting the creation of a government regulation outlining integrated services for handling, protecting, and supporting survivors. Through strategic lobbying and the submission of well-researched proposals, the project achieved success when key proposals were incorporated into draft presidential and government regulations. While facing challenges such as inter-ministerial conflicts and the 2024 general elections, the project ultimately contributed to the passing of a presidential regulation on UPTD PPA. The project also facilitated increased collaboration among law enforcement, universities, and support organisations, leading to improved case referrals and the utilisation of the TPKS law, resulting in restitution for victims and prosecution of perpetrators.



Stop Sexual Violence Advocacy in Indonesia



Kino Media Foundation and filmmaker Nirartha Bas Diwangkara film “Where the Wild Frangipanis Grow,” shedding light on gender-based violence in the Balinese

Despite an ongoing need for complementary government regulation, the project demonstrated the effectiveness of collaborative policy advocacy grounded in the lived experiences of survivors in advancing access to justice and vital support services.





Women leaders in Baringo County, Kenya



Women leaders in Baringo County, Kenya

## HOW HAVE RIGHTSHOLDERS CONTRIBUTED TO THE CREATION OF INCLUSIVE AND RESPONSIVE SOCIETIES?

**By empowering rightsholders, fostering collective action, and promoting influencing capacity, these projects have made significant contributions towards the creation of inclusive and responsive societies. The goal is to create systemic change by addressing inequalities and promoting positive social norms.**

The projects have successfully integrated rightsholder groups into the social fabric, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their needs are addressed. This has resulted in a more equitable distribution of resources and services, leading to improved access for all. Projects have effectively advocated for and facilitated the provision of culturally sensitive and accessible services tailored to the specific needs of rightsholder groups. This has led to a shift towards more effective and responsive service delivery models.

## CASE STUDY

### Communities winning the fight against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Kenya

This case study examines the Men Against Female Genital Mutilation Litigation (MAGML) project's success in improving access to social services related to combating Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Kajiado County, Kenya. The project by Men for the Equality of Men and Women (MEW), intervened in a constitutional challenge to the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act (2011), successfully defending the law by highlighting its importance in protecting women's rights. A key strategy involved engaging with community stakeholders, including church leaders and traditional authorities, fostering a multi-pronged approach to advocacy and sensitisation. This participatory model proved highly effective in shifting societal attitudes and behaviours.

The project's impact extended beyond legal advocacy. The rise of anti-FGM campaigns in Kajiado County, previously an FGM hotspot, directly resulted from the project's targeted activities. Furthermore, the publication of "The Divinity of the Clitoris", a significant outcome of the project, further amplified the message against FGM nationwide. Crucially, the project implemented curative and preventive counselling programs for boys and men, addressing the root causes of FGM within patriarchal structures and promoting behavioural change.

The success of the project hinged on its culturally sensitive approach. By employing hermeneutical tools to understand community norms and socialisation, MEW developed targeted interventions that resonated with communities. This "social vaccine" approach, recognising and addressing the flaws in existing societal structures, proved effective in influencing the attitudes and behaviours of the targeted groups, improving access to protection and services for girls and women at risk of FGM.



## OVERALL CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPACT

The twelve case studies presented in this study showcase the significant and measurable impacts of Voice-supported initiatives in improving access to social services for rightsholder communities across diverse contexts. **Based on empowering rightsholders and strengthening their influencing skills to raise awareness in their communities and with duty bearers, interventions have driven meaningful change, breaking down systemic barriers and delivering concrete improvements in the lives of rightsholders.**

In Cambodia, targeted efforts with Indigenous adolescents, the elderly, and the LGBTQI community have contributed to substantial reductions in child marriage rates and SGBV. These initiatives have also facilitated improved access to culturally sensitive healthcare services and increased representation of rightsholder groups in local governance. The results reflect a tangible shift toward inclusivity in decision-making and resource allocation, empowering these communities to actively shape their futures.

Advocacy efforts have contributed to policy reforms that address disparities in education, and healthcare. For PWD, the interventions in Nigeria and Laos have delivered transformative outcomes. The establishment of disability helplines and dedicated desks within government structures has not only provided immediate support but has also institutionalised mechanisms for ongoing inclusion and advocacy. Enhanced access to vital healthcare services has directly improved health outcomes. In Nigeria, access to assistive devices and increased awareness of disability rights have improved the quality of life for individuals with disabilities, creating pathways for greater societal participation. Similarly, in Indonesia, recognition of the Marapu Indigenous Community's educational needs has resulted in legal and institutional changes, ensuring long-term access to culturally appropriate education and resources. In Laos, advocacy and community support have had a profound impact on LGBTQI individuals and ethnic minorities.

The results go beyond immediate outcomes, demonstrating lasting systemic transformations. By directly addressing critical gaps in access to social services and dismantling structural inequities, these initiatives have strengthened the resilience of rightsholders and contributed to the creation of more inclusive societies.

**These results underscore the power of policy influence in driving systemic change that benefits historically excluded populations. They also reinforce Voice's role as a catalyst for meaningful, sustainable change that improves lives and builds equitable systems.**



Keo Pon and Mey Pon



# SPACE FOR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

This subsection explores the outcomes and impact of projects on the space for political participation and civic engagement for rightsholders, looking at what changes happened at various levels due to the journeys of rightsholders through the intersecting pathways of empowerment, amplification and influencing.



## CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The dominating trend is that civic space has generally shrunk in many countries. This manifested in the form of increased restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and civil society activity. Specific challenges faced by rightsholders vary across the countries but share common threads:



**Civic space restrictions remaining constant, with restrictive laws limiting political engagement either severely (Laos) or at least behind substantial barriers (Tanzania).**



**Crackdowns on civil society, media, and dissent severely limiting the ability of activists and journalists to operate freely (Cambodia, Nigeria, Philippines);**



**Existing systemic inequalities affecting LGBTQI individuals and women (Indonesia, Niger, Uganda)**



**Inequalities combining with conflict or instability (Mali, Niger)**



**Broader social realities undermining effectiveness of affirmative action measures (Kenya, Uganda)**

Overall, the contextual analyses conducted by Voice highlight the need for addressing funding gaps, improving service delivery, and mitigating the impact of conflict and economic hardship as crucial for rightsholders' equitable access of to health and education across all countries.

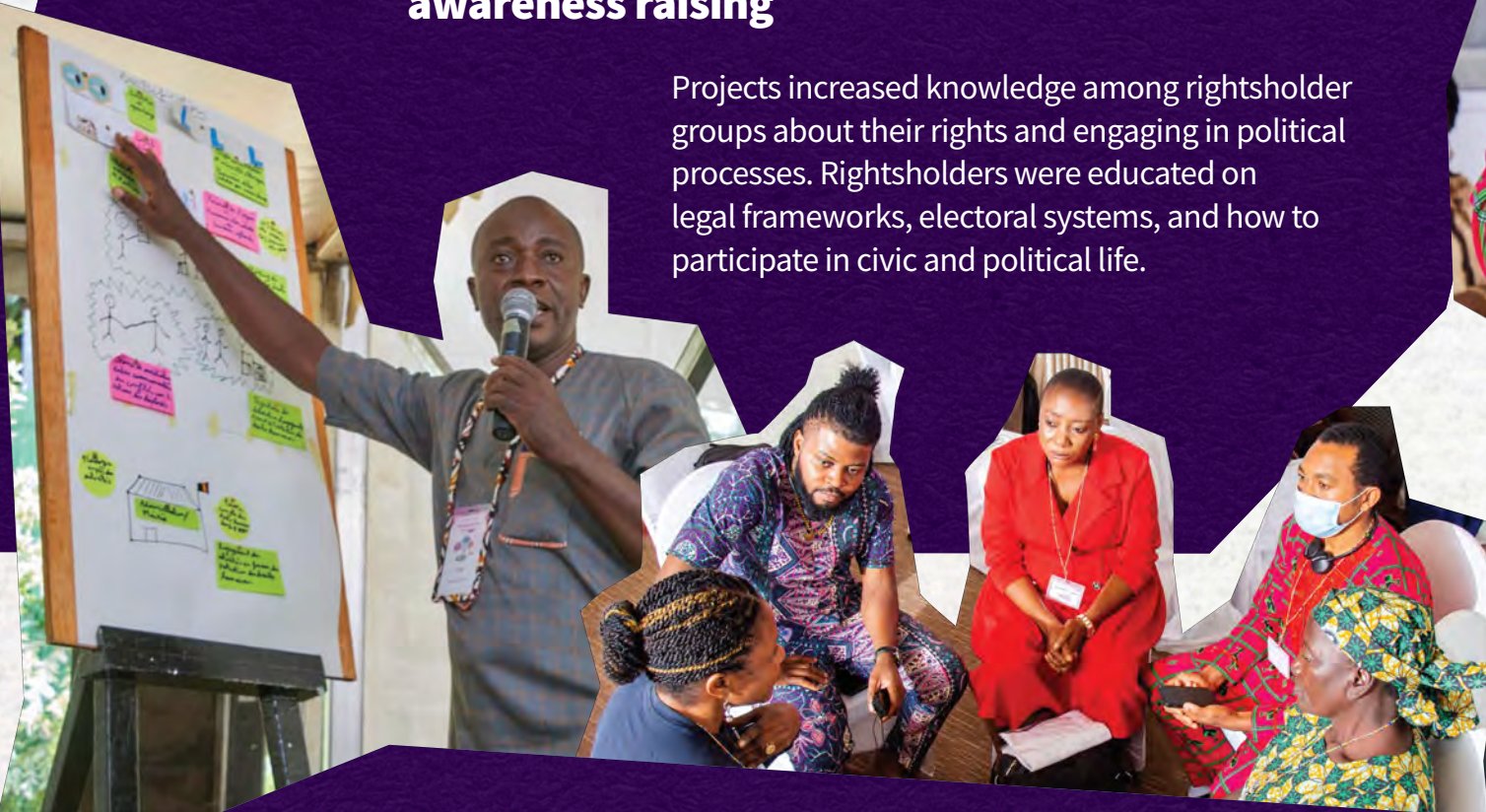


## KEY THEMES

In the face of mounting and dynamic challenges, rightsholders across the Voice focus countries innovated, collaborated and persevered to claim political space and engage politically. Projects targeting this impact area have been primarily led by and involved vulnerable youth and the elderly in Tanzania and Niger, indigenous people and ethnic minorities in the Philippines and across multi-country initiatives, and PWD in Mali and across multi-country initiatives. Key themes include:

### Knowledge-building and awareness raising

Projects increased knowledge among rightsholder groups about their rights and engaging in political processes. Rightsholders were educated on legal frameworks, electoral systems, and how to participate in civic and political life.



### Creating safe spaces for dialogue and confidence-building:

Projects provided safe spaces for rightsholder groups to share experiences, discuss challenges, and receive coaching or mentoring. These spaces helped individuals overcome social stigma, insecurity, and other personal barriers

### Intersectional advocacy and coalition building

Rightsholder groups engaged in collective actions, often bringing together multiple sectors (e.g., youth, women, PWD, ethnic minorities) to build solidarity and strengthen their advocacy on political and social issues.



### Encouraging direct political participation

The empowerment efforts directly led to increased political participation, with rightsholder groups engaging in processes such as voting, advocacy, and even running for political office. By increasing their political literacy and confidence, these groups were able to influence local and national policy decisions.



### Using media and creative arts to amplify voices and shift public perceptions

Using media and creative arts was a strategy that enabled rightsholder groups to raise awareness, build solidarity, and influence social perceptions. These tools helped reach broader audiences and facilitated public discourse around political and social inclusion.







# WHAT CHANGES HAPPENED BECAUSE RIGHTSHOLDERS WERE EMPOWERED?

Dewi Tjakrawinata “Faiza”, a member of the group of youth with Down syndrome in Indonesia, is multi-talented, smart, humble, and dreaming to entertain people with her keyboard

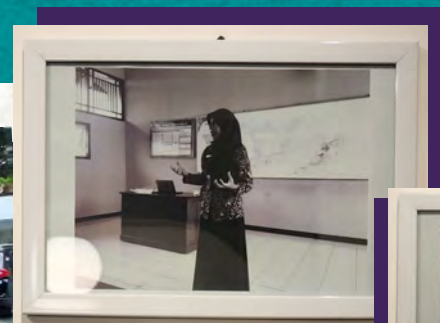
Empowerment strategies engaging rightsholders have increased their knowledge and awareness, fostered their confidence, and facilitated their direct participation in political processes. For instance, the projects have enabled rightsholders to gain knowledge about their rights as well as laws and policies. For indigenous people and ethnic minority groups, awareness-raising has also focused on cultural revival of indigenous practices. For women, the entry point for political engagement has often been combatting SGBV. For young people and ethnic minorities, projects sought to engage them as active citizens and political leaders.

The project made strides in changing attitudes towards political engagement for PWD. Through capacity-building efforts, the project increased political literacy among youth with disabilities, enabling them to express their aspirations and participate more confidently in political discussions. Importantly, the project has also worked with families, teachers, and policymakers to ensure that they understand and support the political rights of disabled youth. A major achievement of the project is the increasing attention it has garnered from policymakers, who are beginning to prioritise the involvement of disability groups in political processes.

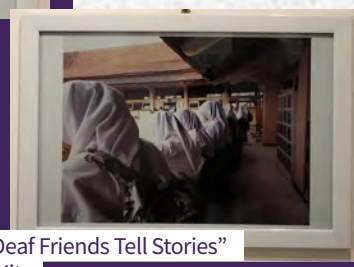
## CASE STUDY



Empowerment grantees in Inodenia



Photos from the “Deaf Friends Tell Stories” exhibition of Kota Kita



## Youth with disabilities participating more confidently in political discussions in Indonesia

The Violet Project, implemented by **Perkumpulan Inisiatif** in collaboration with the **West Java Disability Access Election Center (PPUA)**, aimed to address the significant barriers that youth with disabilities face in exercising their political rights in Indonesia. Despite the constitutional right to vote, individuals with disabilities often encounter exclusion in the electoral process due to physical inaccessibility, lack of inclusive socialisation, and the intervention of family members who prevent them from fully participating.

## Empowerment initiatives also focused on coaching and communications in safe space.

Such projects were critical in facilitating rightsholders to overcome social stigma and insecurities. Among **LGBTQI rightsholders in Cambodia (Love is Diversity, Impact Hub Phnom Penh)** and the **Philippines (Alyansa ng Kabataang Mindanao para Kapayapaan-AKMK, San Julian PRIDE Advocacy Group Inc., GAYON Albay LGBT Org)**, the platforms and networks convened by the projects supported the creation of safe spaces for exchanging stories and capacity strengthening. This led to rightsholders building confidence to speak out on issues affecting their community. In Mali, projects aimed at women and PWD helped them build self-esteem and prepare for electoral participation, leading to their involvement in elections and political leadership (Consortium Association d’Entraide et de Développement).



The crowd during the Pride Together event in Cambodia



AKMK Staff Evaluation

The empowerment of rightsholders led directly to increased political participation and the ability to engage in political processes, such as voting, advocacy, and running for office. In the Philippines, through the initiatives of Task Force Mapalad (TFM), elderly persons and PWD were able to successfully lobby for the allocation of government funds for their community. The Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT) empowered indigenous communities, including the Maasai, Ogiek, Twa, and Benet in East Africa by educating them about land policies, enabling them to engage in land rights advocacy and push for policy reforms. Significantly, women started taking a more active role in these processes.



# WHAT CHANGES HAPPENED BECAUSE RIGHTSHOLDERS TOOK COLLECTIVE ACTIONS?



Suggestion boxes for the setting up of the emergency cell

Rightsholder groups in the Voice focus countries engaged in collective actions that enabled them to build intersectional advocacy agendas, led to their emergence as a representative political force, and gave them the space and confidence to engage with duty bearers and other stakeholders.

Rightsholders' collective initiatives addressed issues from an intersectional perspective and emphasised the importance of solidarity for rightsholder groups. The collective learning process facilitated by **Bamboo and Non-Timber Forest Product Development Association (BNDA) in Laos**, where ethnic minority women and youth exchanged experiences with model villages, fostered a sense of

community and mutual support. Moreover, it raised the profile of ethnic minority women and young people in the community as political leaders. Similarly, Help Age Cambodia came together with four different organisations representing women, PWD, LGBTQI people and people living with HIV to share about the specific issues facing their communities as they age. This meeting became the basis for the formation of the Cambodia Older People Alliance (COPA), ready to start advocating on behalf of the elderly before local and national government.

Rightsholders formed organised groups—such as the student alert cells in Mali, the COPA in Cambodia, and the indigenous women and youth leadership groups in Laos—to advocate for their rights and demand change. Political agency emerged from these collective actions. In Mali, **Femmes et développement (FEDE)** brought together students, teachers and administrators in educational institutions to fight against SGBV. Students are already taking collective actions to create safe pathways for reporting SGBV, demonstrating their commitment to the issue.



Photo in a high school class during awareness raising in Mali

## CASE STUDY

### Students combating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) within schools in Mali

In response to alarming levels of SGBV in schools in Mali, particularly in Bamako, Femme et Développement launched a project to raise awareness, empower students, and promote safe school environments. Targeting six public high schools, the project focused on addressing SGBV through awareness campaigns, training programs, and the establishment of “alert cells” within the schools. Students received training on SGBV prevention, public speaking, and reporting mechanisms, and were encouraged to share their experiences. The project led to significant changes in both attitudes and behaviours within the school environment. Students, teachers, and administrators became more aware of the impact of SGBV and recognised the need for a safe and supportive educational space. The formation of alert cells empowered students to report violence, and a module on SGBV was successfully advocated for in teacher training programs. Testimonies from students highlighted the impact of the project, with many students feeling empowered to stand up against violence, and even taking the initiative to fund their own suggestion box to report issues.



## WHAT CHANGES HAPPENED BECAUSE RIGHTSHOLDERS USED THEIR INFLUENCING CAPACITY?

**Empowered and organised rightsholders groups have demonstrated their strength as a political force, taking definite steps towards political and social inclusion across all Voice focus countries.** Rightsholders have been able to influence political and policy processes at local, national, and even international levels.

The Constellation Albinism Umbrella in 2024



Through lobbying and advocacy, the **Albinism Society of Kenya (ASOK)** pushed for the creation of the **National Albinism Action Plan (NPA)**. This involved working closely with national agencies, international networks (like the Africa Albinism Network), and local stakeholders to design a national framework for the care and protection of persons with albinism. In the Philippines, the TFM galvanised persons with disabilities and the elderly into lobbying and advocating with local government such that the Sangguniang Barangay La Purisima in Manapla approved a resolution to allocate a budget of PHP 85,000 for projects benefiting the two communities for the year 2023.



2024 culminating celebration of Voice in The Philippines

### CASE STUDY

#### Senior citizens and people with disabilities gaining access to resources in the Philippines

In October 2022, the **Sangguniang Barangay La Purisima in Manapla** made a significant step towards inclusivity and resource allocation for its senior citizens and PWD by approving a resolution that allocated PHP 85,000 for projects and activities benefiting SCs and PWD in 2023. The approval of this budget was the result of months of advocacy and capacity-building efforts by TFM through the Voice-funded project. From February to May 2022, TFM conducted training sessions that educated rightsholders in the Barangay La Purisima about their legal rights. Between March and October 2022, the community engaged in active discussions with barangay officials, lobbying for the budget allocation. The approval of the resolution highlights the power of organised, informed communities in advocating for their needs. By equipping rightsholders with knowledge about their legal entitlements, the project empowered them to engage in dialogue and successfully influence local government decision-making. The resolution serves as a model for leveraging local government budgets to benefit rightsholder groups, and its success offers a pathway for expanding support for the elderly and PWD in the region.



2024 culminating celebration of Voice in The Philippines



## It is key to highlight that rightsholder groups didn't work in isolation.

Strategic partnerships with other various stakeholders—government agencies, non-governmental organisations, educational institutions, and international actors—were crucial in gaining allies when influencing change. In the Philippines, Task Force for Indigenous Peoples Rights (TFIP) and Partners for Indigenous Knowledge Philippines (PIKP) collaborated with local government bodies and educational institutions helped integrate indigenous knowledge into broader educational and cultural frameworks. Furthermore, cross-community knowledge exchange also helped strengthen the collective voice of indigenous groups. In Kenya, the drafting of the NPA was facilitated by collaboration between ASOK, government ministries, the Kenya National Human Rights Commission, and international disability organisations such as the African Albinism Network (AAN).

## A critical outcome of rightsholders' influencing was the promotion of social inclusion for rightsholders.

In the Philippines, the TFIP and PIKP project were instrumental in ensuring that indigenous knowledge and culture were seen as valuable contributions to both local and national development agendas. The publication of books and storytelling sessions helped elevate indigenous voices, fostering cultural pride and social respect. In Nigeria, CCD's intervention helped amplify the political voice of PWD, resulting in their inclusion in political party structures, which historically had been closed off to them. Through education, PWD are now more integrated into political and electoral processes.



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Bantay Kita - Participants at the Indigenous Women Forum

TFIP, an Innovate and Learn grantee in the Philippines is using innovative ways to understand and influence policies of change towards studying ethnic minorities in school



# HOW HAVE RIGHTSHOLDERS CONTRIBUTED TO THE CREATION OF INCLUSIVE AND RESPONSIVE SOCIETIES?



The journeys of rightsholders demonstrate the strides they have made claiming their rights as equals in political and civic processes, contributing to the creation of inclusive and responsive societies.

Starting from the individual level, one of the most profound changes has been within rightsholders themselves. They now see themselves as agents of change and advocates for political and civic inclusion. The **Kenya Paraplegic Organisation (KPO)** shares how consistent engagement with women and PWD on budgetary processes at the local level including ensuring their physical access to relevant meetings has enabled the rightsholders to embrace their potential to influence decision-making processes.

In Nigeria, the **Youth and Students Advocates for Development Initiative (YSAD Initiative)**, empowered students to speak out against harassment and intimidation of fellow students by the police. By increasingly sharing videos of police brutality on social media, the students made this a trending topic in Nigeria resulting in sanctions for the offending policemen by government authorities.



## CASE STUDY

### People with disabilities and women overcome barriers to civic participation in Kenya



United Disabled Persons of Kenya

In the 2021-2022 year, the KPO worked to **support the active participation of PWD and women in the county public participation forums for budget-making in two counties.** KPO took steps to ensure that rightsholders received gazette notices, understood the issues on the agenda, and were prepared to represent their concerns during the forums. KPO facilitated consensus-building sessions and developed strategies for effective representation. Additionally, KPO worked with the county government to ensure the accessibility of venues, including proposing modifications and accommodations to address physical, informational, and social barriers, such as stigma and discrimination. Special attention was paid to the double challenge faced by women with disabilities, whose participation is often hindered by societal gender roles and household chores. The support provided helped rightsholders overcome barriers to participation and embrace their potential to influence decision-making processes.

The active involvement of Common Interest Groups (CIGs), which are well-organised with defined leadership structures, made it easier to identify and mobilise participants. However, challenges such as inadequate awareness of citizen participation processes, inaccessible venues and information, and social stigma largely remained. Despite these barriers, the participants who were able to engage showed a strong interest in contributing to governance, reflecting the success of KPO's efforts.





Ms. Le Sen, a Cham Muslim from Kampong Chhnang province, who is a Gender and Minorities Lead at Women Peace Makers and the lead author of Making the Space

Following individual changes, rightsholders transformed the mindsets of those around them and contributed to a cascading effect of wider change in social perceptions towards political and civic inclusion. The **Tanzania Albinism Society (TAS)** worked against all odds to form PWD committees at all levels of government combined with entrepreneurship training for PWD. These activities enabled rightsholders to live with dignity, defying the general limiting mindsets about PWD in society. They define their success as having built the framework for a more inclusive and equitable future for PWD in Tanzania.

In Cambodia, **Women Peace Makers (WPM)** brought together five diverse rightsholder groups to foster solidarity and build unity in their advocacy demands. Their journey documents the empathy, trust and acceptance the diverse groups have built among each other as a key transformation. Moreover, they were able to leverage on creative arts and media to take their learning on empathy, trust and acceptance more widely in Cambodian society moving them forward towards their goal of creating a peaceful and gender-just society.



Yav Thip joining the reflection and learning series with the five communities, July 2022



## CASE STUDY

### Women voicing out against multiple marginalisation in Cambodia

The **“Our Turn!” project, led by WPM**, empowered rightsholder groups — including indigenous women, blind women, LGBTQI people, ethnic, religious and cultural minorities, and interethnic youth — through collective action and intersectional solidarity. **The project encouraged the groups to generate new knowledge about their own communities and develop customised advocacy efforts.** The approach emphasised building unity, capacity, and leadership within each group, leading to increased political participation and self-advocacy. The initiative’s impact is profound, both in terms of individual empowerment and collective transformation. Participants reported changes in self-esteem and agency, enabling them to advocate for themselves and their communities. Notable outcomes included blind women advocating for workforce inclusion, indigenous women pushing for culturally tailored responses to violence, and LGBTQI communities seeking recognition of their rights. The project also utilised creative methods such as art exhibitions, Facebook Live shows, and public forums to engage broader society and raise awareness about the challenges faced by rightsholders. As a result, the initiative fosters greater empathy and understanding, contributing to a society where the voices of historically excluded groups are amplified and their rights recognised.

Yav Thip sharing her idea during the Forum Theater Training of Trainers, October 2022







**Institutional changes towards respect for human rights and including, arising from the collective organising and influencing efforts of rightsholders, are also visible.**

In Mali, through the efforts of **Pôle de Protection des Droits Humains (PDH)**, local authorities in two districts have committed to upholding human rights by signing two “declarations of commitment.” One of the significant outcomes of these efforts has been the continued support of the new transitional authorities, who have prioritised addressing human rights abuses, particularly those linked to the practice of slavery. In 2023, at least 203 individuals accused of slavery-related human rights violations were put on trial as a result.

In the Philippines, **the Barangay Local Government Unit (LGU) of Rogongon, Iligan City established an LGBTI Desk in the Barangay Hall**, a result of successful lobbying by IMGLAD Rogongon and Tribu Inisyatibu. The desk serves as a crucial step toward the inclusion and empowerment of LGBTQI individuals in the community, providing a dedicated space for members to voice concerns, access services, and reducing stigma and discrimination.



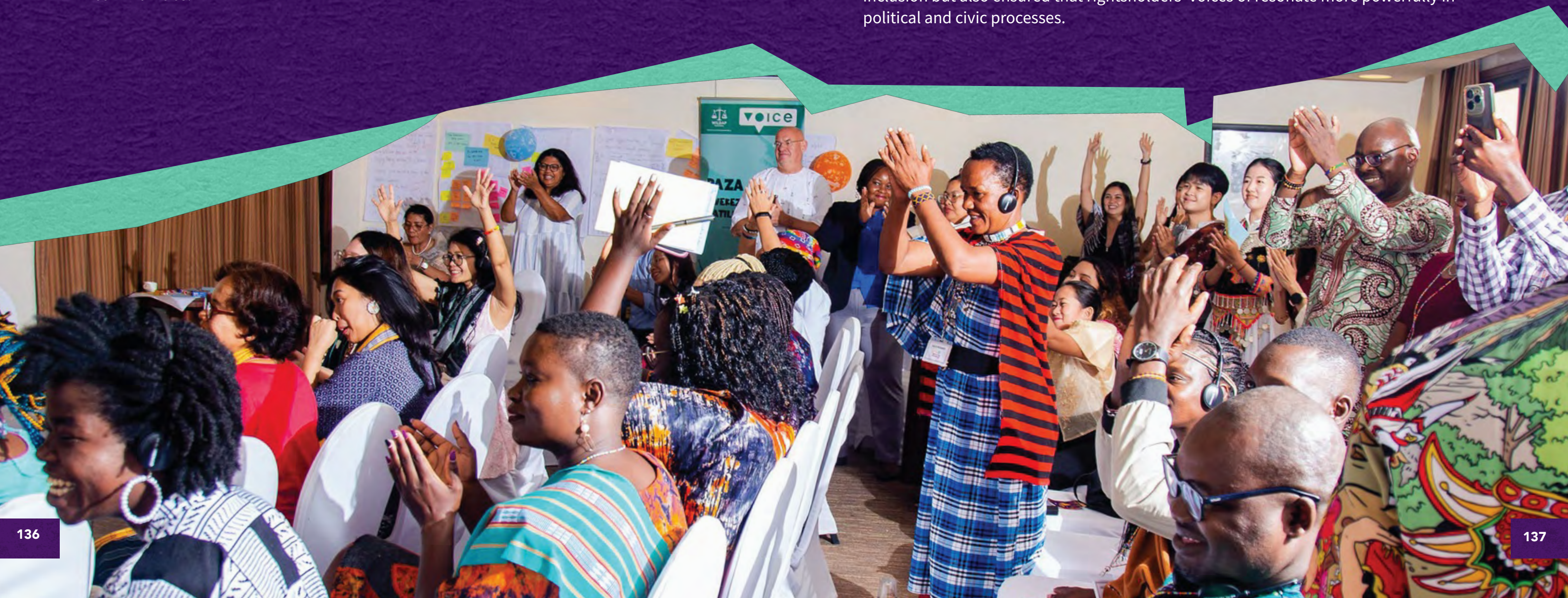
# OVERALL CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPACT

**Voice-supported initiatives have significantly empowered rightsholders, equipping them with knowledge and confidence to engage actively in political and civic processes.** By fostering a deeper understanding of their own rights and the political systems around them, these projects have enabled rightsholders to advocate effectively for their needs and drive meaningful change in their communities. For instance, youth with disabilities in Indonesia and Indigenous communities in East Africa gained critical insights into their political rights, which empowered them to participate in elections, advocate for land rights, and influence both local and national policies. Through safe spaces and capacity-building efforts, women, LGBTQI individuals, and persons with disabilities overcame stigma and challenged historical exclusion, gaining greater public visibility and motivating their participation in local and national elections, advocacy campaigns, and leadership roles within their communities.

**Solidarity and coalition-building emerged as a key enabler of change.** By fostering intersectional advocacy, Voice-supported projects united diverse groups to amplify their collective voice. Communities organised and mobilised around shared goals, leading to tangible outcomes such as improved representation in policymaking. In Laos, Indigenous youth successfully advocated for increased representation, while groups like COPA leveraged collective action to push for policy changes that impacted their communities.

**Empowered rightsholder groups also demonstrated their ability to influence institutional and policy landscapes.** Through strategic lobbying efforts, organisations such as the ASOK and TFM in the Philippines secured critical political support and resource gains for their constituencies. These achievements highlighted the capacity of rightsholders to shape policy and institutional frameworks to be more inclusive and equitable.

**Beyond political engagement, these efforts contributed to shifting societal attitudes toward rightsholders.** Through media campaigns, creative arts, and public advocacy, Voice-supported initiatives raised awareness and visibility, reshaping public perceptions and fostering greater acceptance. These cultural shifts have not only increased social inclusion but also ensured that rightsholders' voices resonate more powerfully in political and civic processes.







# 07

## CONCLUSION

**Rightsholder-led projects funded by Voice have demonstrably improved access to resources and employment for rightsholder groups across diverse geographic contexts.** This impact stems from a multifaceted approach encompassing resource provision, capacity strengthening, advocacy, and policy influence. The resulting empowerment extends beyond individual benefit to systemic change, challenging discriminatory norms and fostering inclusiveness in economic and political spheres.

Findings also highlight the **measurable impact of projects funded through Voice on improving access to social services.** Interventions empowered rightsholders and strengthened their influencing skills to raise awareness on access to education and healthcare in their communities and with duty bearers, while addressing specific issues such as child marriage and SGBV. Successful and advocacy efforts led to policy reforms addressing disparities and fostered the inclusion of rightsholder groups in local governance. These results point to lasting systemic transformations, strengthening community resilience and building more inclusive societies.

Furthermore, **Voice-funded projects significantly empowered rightsholders by creating space for political participation and citizen engagement.** Increased awareness of their rights and political processes, combined with capacity strengthening and safe spaces, facilitated greater participation in elections, advocacy campaigns, and leadership roles. Solidarity building and coalition efforts fostered intersectional advocacy, resulting in policy reforms and improved social inclusion. The resulting shifts in social attitudes and public perception underscore the transformative effect of empowering rightsholders to become active agents of change.



IDAHOBIT in Cambodia



# COMMONALITIES ACROSS THE IMPACT AREAS

The findings illustrate a range of transformative changes driven by Voice-supported initiatives across diverse contexts and marginalised rightsholder groups. Despite differences in local challenges and approaches, there are several commonalities across all the analysed projects:

## Empowerment of individual and communities

One commonality has been the empowerment of individuals and communities. Voice supported initiatives enabled rightsholders to amplify their voices, take control of their lives, and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. This included building the knowledge, skills, confidence of individuals and communities to organise, communicate, and advocate for their needs. This empowerment has translated into greater agency, resilience, and influence for rightsholder groups, reshaping power dynamics and fostering more inclusive communities.



## Collaboration

Collaboration has been the common enabler for the grantee partners, demonstrating the power of partnerships between rightsholders, civil society organisations, governments, and private sector actors. This includes promoting understanding of disability, gender diversity, and other sensitive topics, as well as shifting public perception and combat prejudice against rightsholder groups. By working together, these diverse stakeholders have driven policy changes, influenced local governance, and built supportive networks that continue to strengthen advocacy efforts and sustain the impact of their initiatives.

## Shift in social norms and attitude

Another commonality is the shift in social norms and attitudes. Efforts to challenge entrenched biases and promote respect for diverse identities have led to tangible changes, such as men participating in traditionally female-dominated tasks, community acceptance of PWD, and private sector partnerships that embrace diversity and inclusion. These shifts signify progress towards breaking down barriers and creating spaces where all individuals are valued and respected.

## Inclusive policies and practices

Finally, the findings emphasise the importance of inclusive policies and practices that address the specific needs of rightsholder groups.

While many of the examples focus on specific interventions, they ultimately contribute to a larger goal of creating systemic change.

From influencing financial policies at regional levels to creating local community agreements, these efforts underscore the value of policies that are shaped by, and responsive to, the lived experiences of rightsholders.



**Ultimately, the Meta-Analysis highlights the significance of empowering marginalised rightsholder groups to drive their own advocacy and development agendas as well as the transformative potential of Voice's innovative model of combining grant-making, capacity strengthening and L&L, particularly in contexts where traditional funding mechanisms often exclude these groups.**





CHAPTER  
**05**

**HOW  
WE  
SPENT?**



# HOW WE SPENT?

Voice was an **eight-year fund (April 2016-March 2025) totalling Euro 89.8 million of which Euro 88.4 million comes from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in three phases:** phase 1- Euro 50 million and a first extension phase- 36 million. In 2022, a second extension phase of 2.4 million was approved to allow for projects to run until 30 June 2024 and enable fund management until 31 March 2025. Administratively, we kept the first phase and the extension phase separate, although it was agreed with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs that we could take any balances forward to the Extension Phase. The extension to the extension phase was requested and approved based on lessons learned from closure of phase 1, where we found a significant number of partners to require a longer than planned project duration to complete their activities.

## FINANCIAL REPORT 2016-2025

The data and numbers on this page are a summary from the unqualified audit report 2025, which is available on the website and on request.

OVERALL EXPENDITURE	2016-2023	2024-2025	TOTAL	OVERALL BUDGET	% SPENT
Grant commitments	€ 60,009,764	€ 1,082,001	€ 61,091,765	€ 61,277,500	100%
Programme Management and Administration	€ 14,686,565	€ 2,769,620	€ 17,456,185	€ 17,569,538	99%
Linking and Learning	€ 6,784,836	€ 1,585,111	€ 8,369,947	€ 8,792,629	95%
VAT (1)	€ 1,819,437	€ 319,631	€ 2,139,068	€ 2,119,833	101%
Total up to June 2025	€ 83,300,602	€ 5,756,363	€ 89,056,965	€ 89,759,500	99%

## FINANCIAL REPORT 2024-2025

A. MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION	OPERATIONAL BUDGET 2024-2025	EXPENSES 2024-2025	DEPLETION %
Context, gender and actor analysis	€ 0	-	0%
Planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting	€ 1,324,287.98	€ 1,278,516	97%
Administration (including of the subsidy facility)T	€ 1,449, 444.32	€ 1,440,309	99%
Advisory Board	€ 30,000	€ 10,568	35%
Linking and Learning process	€ 1,958,605.97	€ 1,585,111	81%




B. LINKING AND LEARNING PROCESS	OPERATIONAL BUDGET 2024-2025	EXPENSES 2024-2025	DEPLETION %
C. COMMUNICATION AND PROMOTION OF THE FUND			
Other Deliverables	€ 85,000	€ 40,277	50%
SUB-TOTAL MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION AND OTHER DELIVERABLES	€ 2,883,732	€ 2,769,620	96%
SUB-TOTAL LINKING AND LEARNING PROCESS	€ 1,958,606	€1,585,111	81%
TOTALS / YEAR	€ 4,845,338	€ 4,354,731	90%
VAT / 21% budget, expenses also 0%	€ 328,023	€ 319,631	97%
<b>TOTAL OVERALL</b>	<b>€ 5,170,361</b>	<b>€ 4,674,362</b>	<b>90%</b>

# INTEGRITY

Voice has been committed to providing safe spaces filled with integrity and respect for ALL people as well as for financial resources. The consortium partners, Oxfam and Hivos – which make up Voice – maintain a zero-tolerance policy towards both fraud and safeguarding, and the organisational processes are invoked depending on the country where a potential integrity issue arises. At the request of the Ministry, we have developed a dedicated webpage sharing our whistleblower policy and explaining what happens when an issue is reported.

This is in addition to all the information available on the websites of Hivos and Oxfam. As Voice, we also have a direct reporting obligation to the Ministry. Considering the size, complexity, and the (reasonable) risks Voice takes in its grant-making approach (especially in working with mostly grassroots organisations operating in challenging socioeconomic, political, and legal environments) it is inevitable that issues occur. In response, the programme took a learning-oriented approach that continuously adapted appropriate due diligence, grant management, and monitoring requirements and processes over time. We promote the same approach among our partners, encouraging openness about challenges without compromising personal safety or confidentiality. A key lesson learned is that safeguarding integrity requires more than policies; it demands continuous reflection on power dynamics, the courage to resist bureaucratic shortcuts, and a deep commitment to trust-building, mutual accountability and transparency with every grantee partner.

## MONETARY COMMITMENTS PER GRANT TYPE

MONETARY COMMITMENTS PER GRANT TYPE (1)	TOTALS 2016-2023(2)	2024	TOTAL OVERALL SPENT	BUDGET (3)	% SPENT
 EMPOWERMENT ACCELERATOR	€ 2,760,221	€ -94,271	€ 2,660,004	€ 2,500,000	106.64%
 EMPOWERMENT	€ 7,149,168	€ 37,251	€ 7,186,419	€ 7,415,000	96.92%
 INFLUENCING	€ 24,273,349	€ -104,528	€ 24,168,821	€ 26,350,000	91.72%
 INNOVATE AND LEARN	€ 21,763,523	€ 1,135,559	€ 22,899,082	€ 21,462,500	106.69%
 SUDDEN OPPORTUNITY	€ 4,063,503	€ 107,936	€ 4,171,439	€ 3,550,000	117.51%
TOTAL	€ 60,009,764	€ 1,082,001	€ 61,091,765	€ 61,277,500	99.70%

(1) PROGRAM FUNDS MOFA AND HEWLETT

(2) HEWLETT PROGRAM FUNDS WERE ADDED TO DATA 2016-23!

(3) EXTRA BUDGET HEWLETT 3RD GRANT ADDED



**The overwhelming sense at the close of this programme is one of gratitude. It has been an extraordinary privilege to lead this pioneering initiative in close cooperation with the Netherlands MFA, standing in solidarity with rightsholder groups in all their beauty and diversity. Voice was born out of a commitment to put the NOW-Us principle into practice, to amplify the voices of rightsholders, and to challenge systemic inequalities. Over the past eight years, it has borne witness to the myriad achievements of rightsholders leading the charge for change.**

Voice's legacy highlights a fundamental truth: putting rightsholders at the centre is also at the heart of transformative social change. Their knowledge of what needs to change, their deep understanding of their own dynamics, and their unwavering commitment to improve their lives and contribute to their societies, makes them uniquely positioned to address systemic inequalities and build more inclusive and responsive societies. Yet, their ability to create lasting change also depends on sustained support. The funding, trust, and solidarity they receive are not just enablers of projects—they are long-term investments in a more equitable world.

Voice's journey has also been one of profound learning for all involved. For Hivos, Oxfam, the Netherlands MFA, and the hundreds of grantee partners, Voice has been more than a programme—it has been a catalyst for deep introspection and growth. It provided an avenue to collectively confront the complexities of working with grassroots organisations, challenge traditional notions of development and accountability, and deepen understanding of what it means to support inclusion with an intersectional lens. These insights have shaped the Voice team and impacted both organisations. We hope this will continue to influence how the sector at large engages with and serves rightsholder groups in the future.

Though the Voice programme ends here, the journey toward inclusion does not. It is our hope that the stories, lessons, and impacts captured in this report will support ongoing efforts, reminding those that read of all of that is possible when we listen, trust, and act in partnership with rightsholders. With bittersweet emotions, we bid farewell, but we look ahead with unwavering hope and determination for the inclusive future Voice has helped to envision.

## CONCLUSION





## A FINAL NOTE: WHAT WE WISH WE COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY OR OUR WISH-LIST FOR THE FUTURE

While Voice has achieved so much, there are key areas we wish we could have explored or expanded upon to align more closely with our values and aspirations. The programme's design, shaped by strict legal requirements, often limited our ability to push the boundaries of innovation even more and fully embody trust-based and inclusive practices. Here are a few examples of what remained pending as our own homework and that we hoped to implement or expand upon but were unable to. As Voice has now ended, we have transformed that list into wishes for others walking the same journey as us:

## FULLY EMBRACE PARTICIPATORY GRANT-MAKING:

While Voice emphasised inclusion, we could not fully transition to a participatory grant-making model, where grantee partners and rightsholders actively shape funding decisions. We invite other grant-makers to visit the Participatory Grant-Making Community Blog or the library of resources compiled by Candid to find inspiration to continue “shifting the power”!

## EXPAND TRUST-BASED GRANT-MAKING PRACTICES:

Simplifying reporting and application processes reduces administrative burdens on grantee partners, allowing them to focus more on delivering impact rather than navigating bureaucratic hurdles. This builds mutual trust and demonstrates confidence in grantee partners' abilities and expertise. It would have also enabled Voice to go even further when working with “smaller” and new organisations that may struggle with complex administrative requirements. Similarly, we invite our grant-making peers to check out the resources and insights from the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project and the Fenomenal Funds funder collaborative.



Voice Paza Festival in Zanzibar, Tanzania, in 2019



Talents Enabling Uganda (TEU) grantees awarded the top 10-rightsholder winners at the Empowered women business pitch competition in Uganda



## ADVANCE COMPETITION-FREE GRANT-MAKING:

Adopting a rolling application process, rather than adhering to fixed funding cycles, can allow grant-makers to respond in real-time to partners' needs and tackle emerging opportunities. While Voice had Sudden Opportunity Grants, expanding it further could have made our support even more dynamic.

We would even advise removing competition entirely, following on the work of the Equality Fund and its partners. By adopting non-competitive frameworks, grant-makers can create space for co-designed solutions, where funding decisions are shaped by dialogue and shared goals rather than by arbitrary ranking. Such an approach is not only better aligned with the principles of intersectionality and equity, but also empowers grantees to focus on impact rather than competing for limited resources.

## IF YOU CANNOT GIVE MORE... GIVE CORE:

Providing more core, unrestricted funding to support grantee partners' long-term sustainability and strategic priorities, rather than tying funds strictly to project-specific deliverables. Offering more core funding could have strengthened grantee partners' resilience and ability to respond to crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. And the evidence so far points out that providing core funding is an incredibly beneficial and powerful tool that can transform organisations and amplify their impact. We were only able to approve a maximum amount of 7% of the total project amount for overheads costs, while the ongoing range is now between 15% and 30% in full recognition of the rising costs to survive, let alone thrive as an organisation. We wished we would have been able to at least double this percentage!



## DE-CENTRE FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS:

Traditional risk-management and organisational due diligence processes are often blind to the needs of grassroots organisations with limited resources—precisely the groups that funders like Voice aim to support. To overcome this barrier, funders should adopt less rigid approaches that focus not only on financial health but also on factors such as: the organisation's willingness to grow and learn, its commitment to its mission, the inclusiveness of the rightsholder groups it serves in its governance, how accountable they are to their constituents, and if they “walk their talk” when it comes to their values. By shifting the emphasis away from purely financial metrics and risks, funders can open opportunities for these critical grassroots organisations to receive support and thrive.





## **BUILD YOUR OWN CAPACITY TO WORK AT THE GRASSROOTS:**

Effective collaboration with grassroots organisations requires a nuanced understanding of local dynamics, cultural sensitivities, and community-level challenges. If supporting organisations at this level is your goal, we invite funders prioritize communication that is clear, respectful, and inclusive, while embracing flexible, non-linear, and adaptive approaches to project management.

To appreciate small wins and incremental changes, which are often deeply impactful at the community level, yet are frequently undervalued in traditional funding frameworks. Looking back, we wish we could have deepened our “Mindful Inclusion” learning trajectory, given the importance of investing more to build our own capacities along these lines.

## **INVEST MORE IN THE POWER OF COLLABORATION:**

In a landscape of shrinking resources, increased collaboration among grant-makers is essential to amplify our collective impact and share costs. Aligning strategies, pooling resources, and co-creating solutions can create synergies that drive systemic change. Voice definitely benefited by working with the TAI Collaborative and ISDAO but we were only able to “scratch the surface”. Therefore, we encourage other grant-makers and funders to proactively seek collaborations with like-minded funds.

## **LEVERAGE EXISTING GRANT-MAKING STRUCTURES:**

Rather than investing in new grant-making structures that require significant start-up costs and time, grant-makers can achieve greater efficiency and impact by partnering with established civil society-led funding mechanisms such as Leading from the South, Amplify Change, the Prospera International Network of Women’s Funds (INWF), and numerous so-called Global South Intermediary Organisations (GSIs). Building upon their structures, expertise, and lessons learned can help avoid operational delays and ensure resources are directed where they are most needed, faster and more effectively.







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Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the  
Netherlands



OXFAM

